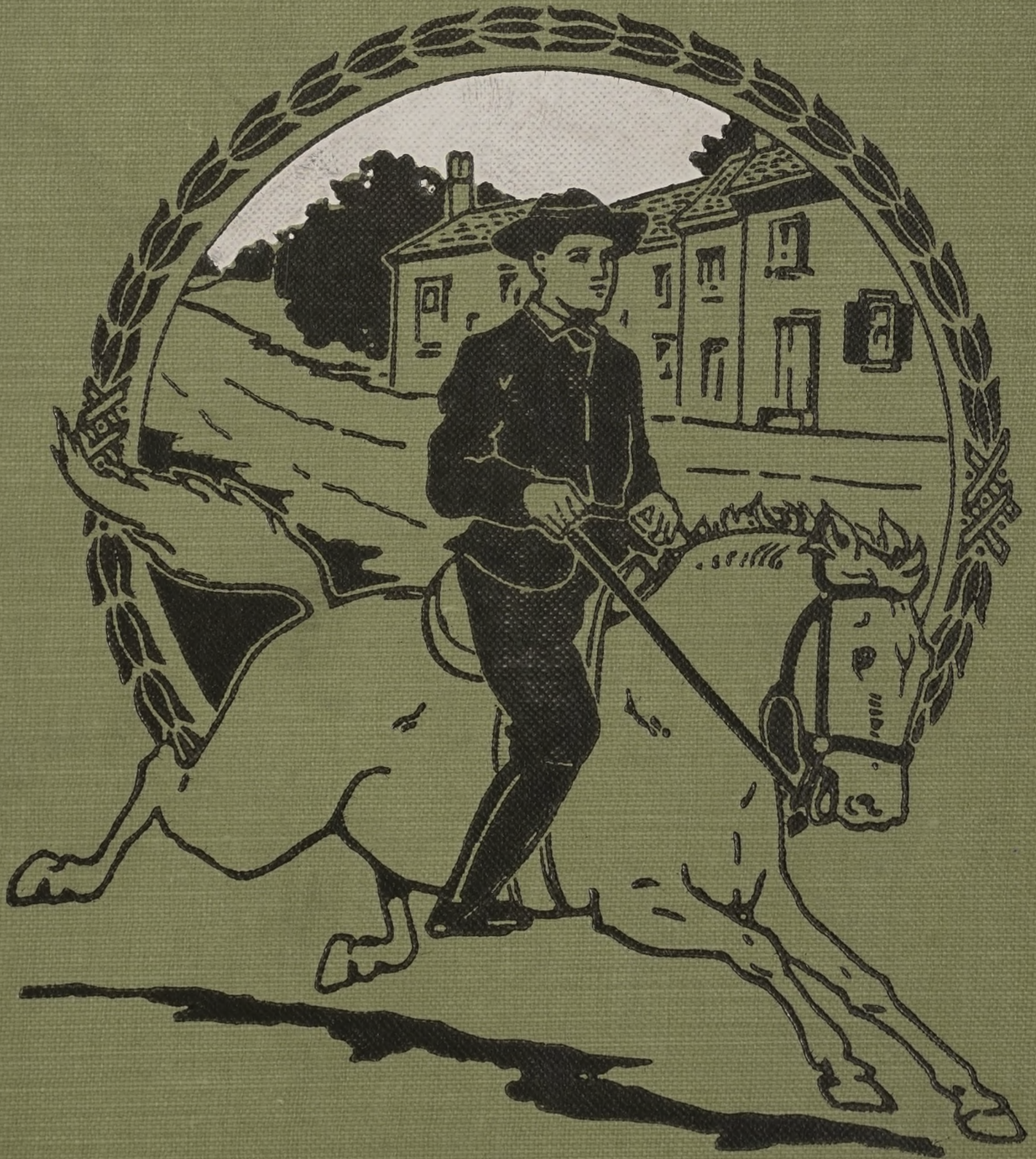


CHARLIE CHITTYWICK

REV. DAVID BEARNE, S.J.





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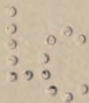
CHARLIE CHITTYWICK

Charlie Chittywick

BY

REV. DAVID BEARNE, S.J.,

AUTHOR OF "SANCTITY'S ROMANCE: STORIES OF THE BRIGHT AGES,"
"THE RIDINGDALE BOYS," ETC.



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CHARLIE CHITTYWICK

CHAPTER I.

FORTY YEARS AGO.

IN the sixties, the High Street of Riddingdale was much more picturesque than it is to-day. To begin with, there were fewer shops, and just one solitary window of plate glass—the extravagant idea of a draper who tried to live up to it and failed, in more senses than one. Now, I think, there is but one establishment that does not display its wares behind panes that are insured against the flying stone or the kicking horse.

Personally I think them much less interesting than the old bow-windows, and not nearly so artistic as the bull's-eye panes that provoked curiosity and gave to certain wares a fictitious value. At night-time the old glass lit up quite bewitchingly, and if you were a boy with the smallest gift of imagination you could see more things in those fantastically-shaped knobs than modern young ladies (of both sexes) see by crystal-gazing and other fooleries.

The beautiful is always the useful; of its own nature it must be so. But the converse does not hold. The useful, *i.e.*, the merely useful, if often very ugly, though its utility may justify its existence. Some of the old Riddingdale

shops soon showed a tendency to become crowded. On market day it was no uncommon thing to see people waiting on the pavement outside until the surging throng of three or four people at the counter had brought their business, plus a little gossip, to an end. When you come "into town" only once a week you wish to enjoy yourself, and hurry is not conducive to enjoyment—or gossip. Moreover, at the grocer's a good deal of exchange went on, and involved arithmetical puzzles that sometimes taxed the shopman's ability. For farmers' wives brought butter and eggs, to say nothing of cheese and poultry, and old Harwood's temper was sometimes sorely tried over bargains that these ladies tried to drive. "Butter was making an old man of him," he was once heard to say, and when he died, I think about a year afterwards, little Freddy Armstrong thought how sad it was that such a good man should be killed by so necessary an article. No mention of butter was made upon his tomb-stone and Freddy thought it a pity. But at that time the boy was very young.

There was the same difficulty at Miss Rippell's. The little shop itself—being at once a stationer's and bookseller's, and emporium for fancy goods, a Berlin-wool warehouse and a circulating library—yielded but the minimum of space to its customers. There were two chairs at the counter, and once these were occupied by two ladies in the costume of the period, the establishment shrank to rather small dimensions; so small indeed that Freddy, to whom some parts of Miss Rippell's were as a fairy palace, greatly

resented the presence of spreading crinolines and those who wore them. For the big counter was a literary Eldorado, and the picture papers alone were a small boy's feast.

Once, however, the stress of market day was over, there were times when even Miss Rippell's and the grocer's were empty by the hour together. Such periods were the loafer's opportunity.

There were several loafers in Ridingdale, chiefly of the retired tradesmen and "independent gentlemen" order. They had no club and (happily for them) they could not spend all their time in the bar-room of the Ridingdale Arms. I said there were no clubs: there were several of an informal and casual sort. One met every morning of the week, except Sundays, at Colpington's. Colpington was the chemist, and the coterie that assembled at his counter was small and exclusive. It generally consisted of Colonel Ruggerson, Dr. Nuttlebig, and old lawyer Hipkins. If their number was added to, it was by accident. They discussed the news of the day, both local and general, and buyers of penn'orths of syrups and ounces of essences and oils were often entertained by heated political arguments. *The Illustrated London News* and *Punch* always lay on a side counter to afford entertainment to waiting customers.

But the person who might aptly be called the Loafer of Loafers belonged to no club, however informal. He gave one the impression of belonging to nothing and nobody—albeit he was at the service of everybody. His taste seemed to be for shops; it is certain that particular shops were very

much to his taste. The baker, the confectioner, and the grocer were more honoured, or exasperated, by the attentions of Master Charles Chittywick than either Miss Rip-pell or Mr. Colpington; yet there were times when both the bookseller and the chemist gave him shelter and conversation, if not hospitality. Charlie had his uses, of course. He did not belong to the class from which errand boys are usually taken, but he was always ready to run here and there with parcel or letter or message. Nay, there were days when he was actually in demand as a kind of supplementary-deputy-sub-assistant errand-lad. These were good days for Charlie.

When Freddy Armstrong, the maltster's son, was six and a half, Charlie seemed to be a big lad—though he was rather small for his age. In some vague childish way Freddy was sorry for him. More than once indeed Freddy had reason to be grateful to him. The distance to his dame school was so short that the little chap was sometimes allowed to go alone but between his home and Miss Pitchett's there lived a terrible ogre of a boy whose very name frightened him. The ogre was called Skinny Bobington. He never really assaulted Freddy, but he had a habit of dancing across the road with outspread arms and hideous cries and grimaces that terrified the little chap exceedingly. A nurse who ought to have known better told him that Bobington was called "Skinny" because he had once skinned a small boy alive and eaten him for supper. He certainly looked quite capable of cannibalism.

One day Charlie Chittywick came up just in the nick of time and Skinny Bobington went down with great rapidity—was rolled over in the dust and retired howling. Freddy was too frightened, or too shy, to thank Charlie at the time, but the child's interest in his rescuer was deepened by this incident.

At this period Charlie always looked pale and ill and very hungry. He rarely seemed to have anything to do. Often too he looked cross and discontented, and generally unhappy; but for this he would have been rather handsome, for his features were small and regular, and he had the curliest hair of any lad in Ridingle. His clothes were always shabby, yet somehow he always looked neat and clean, and not all like the down-at-heel loafer he really was. His sad face used to haunt Freddy—particularly on summer evenings when seven o'clock bed meant lying awake for a good hour or more, and when the tales he told himself took on a melancholy tinge and ended in a distressing waking dream. Often in these stories Charlie was his hero. The shadow of sorrow seemed to be thick upon him, and try as Freddy would he could not make his hero's history end happily.

Now and then Freddy saw him in the highest possible spirits, and the sight did him good. When they met they always nodded and smiled, and Freddy never dreamt of saying his prayers without mentioning Charlie's name. But when Freddy pleaded that his benefactor might be asked—at any rate to the orchard and garden, for playing

purposes, his mother told him kindly but firmly that that could never be. Freddy little guessed that Charlie was known to most people as the biggest liar and thief in Riddingdale.

The loafer had won his heart. If he could have done so Freddy would have shared with him everything he had. He was shy of stopping to speak to him, and as often as not would put the apple or orange or biscuits into Charlie's hands without saying a word. "Are you *sure* you don't want them?" the big boy would ask. He always hesitated to take what was offered him. Sometimes indeed he looked troubled and perplexed, and held the thing in his outstretched hand that Freddy might take it back if he chose to do so; unlike Skinny Bobington who once, propitiated with six pear-drops, had immediately put them in his mouth and asked for more.

"But, I say—isn't it your lunch or something?" Charlie asked one day when, on his way to school, Freddy gave him a big hunch of plum-cake neatly wrapped in tissue paper. The child shook his head and said nothing—hoping that he was not acting a lie. It was his eleven o'clock snack, this hunch of cake, and Charlie knew it.

"You oughtn't to give me this," he said, trying to slip it back into Freddy's small pocket. "It's jolly good of you, of course. You're an awfully decent kid and I like you ever so much. And, look here," he continued as he began to cram the little package into the child's pocket—

“if Skinny Bobington frightens you again, just tell me and I’ll punch his head for him.”

He was stooping down to force the wedge of cake into a pocket that was much too small for it when Freddy suddenly flung his arms about Charlie’s neck and kissed him.

“What’s that for?” the loafer demanded with a puzzled and amused smile. “What an affectionate little beggar you are!” he exclaimed with a laugh. “It’s a jolly long time since anybody kissed me, I can tell you. Why did you do it?”

In another moment the big boy was out of sight.

Freddy must have caught the spirit of pity, and therefore of love, from his mother. Her sympathy was affective and effective, and but for her husband, who had his own reasons for disliking Charlie Chittywick, she would have done much for the loafer. As it was, she dared not suffer him to come near the house. A little Protestant child of six has no very clear idea as to what a Papist may be; Freddy gathered that it was something very dreadful—much worse than thief and liar—and that Charlie Chittywick was a Papist.

In the early sixties, the Catholic congregation of Ridingdale was a tiny one, and nearly half its members lived several miles from the little chapel built by Colonel Ruggerson’s grandfather at the end of the eighteenth century. Happily, a Ruggerson had always lived in Ridingdale, and though there had been times when Mass was said only once a month, the chapel had never been abandoned. It was in these same sixties that a good old Irish priest, one Father

Connelly, rode sixteen miles every Sunday—at intervals he came on Sunday afternoon—to give this small scattered flock the benefits of their religion. One third of the congregation was Irish, most of them farm labourers who had come over to England for harvesting and, for one reason or other, had not returned to their own country.

But Colonel Ruggerson was a power in Ridingle; no one could afford to quarrel with him. For years the Hall had been shut up, and there was no one in the neighbourhood to dispute the Colonel's right to be regarded as the leading inhabitant and the representatively wealthy man. If he had cared to do so he might have called himself Squire of Ridingle: his military title, perhaps, saved him from being so addressed in every-day conversation with the townsfolk. At that time it seemed exceedingly unlikely that the Hall would ever receive another tenant; as a matter of fact, some years later than the period I am writing of, it was taken possession of by the newly-married and very poor grandson of old Lord Dalesworth—Jack Ridingle. My readers must clearly understand that I am introducing them to a period long anterior to the birth of Lancelot Ridingle and his brothers. .

Mr. Frederick Armstrong, farmer as well as maltster, was a moneyed man. Little Freddy was his youngest child and his only son—though there were three daughters. Armstrong was a Baptist and everybody knew it. The Baptist minister of Ridingle was painfully aware of it. Dissent was strong in this country town, but the strongest

of the sects was that of the Calvinistic Baptists, and quite the strongest of the Baptists was Freddy's father. Armstrong had a freehold farm: his finger was in every local pie. He was a guardian of the poor, chairman of the Local Board, the biggest shareholder in the local Gas Company, and greatest distinction of all, a director of a great Railway Company. "Armstrong is a warm man," was a remark often made in the bar-room of the Ridingle Arms—a remark always assented to.

Only once had he been taken in by a fellow-townsmen, but the take-in was a serious one. And the man who had effected it and who was daily denounced by the warm-tempered, as well as warm-pocketed, maltster, was Charlie Chittywick's father—"the greatest scoundrel that ever darkened my doors," Mr. Armstrong said.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOAFER OF LOAFERS.

THE Chittywick family had always been a shiftless one. Its head was a man of many pretensions and of the shadiest reputation. In days when it was easy for a person who had failed in everything else to offer himself as an instructor of youth, he had kept a school: a sorry affair that was labelled "Seminary for Young Gentlemen." And for a few years it actually succeeded. As many as fourteen boarders and nearly twenty day-boys were for a short time found in Mr. Chittywick's school. What and how he taught, need not be told. He was the son of a factory-hand at Hardlow and had begun life as a pupil-teacher in the elementary school there.

When the Seminary broke up, as it did after two or three fitful years, Mr. Chittywick began to travel on commission. He had married a woman quite as shiftless and irresponsible as himself and, if anything, more pretentious. She was a Catholic, and had been—some said a lady's-maid, some said a nursery-governess. They had two daughters and a son.

If William Lethers had had the time and the inclination, he could have told many amusing, and some very sad, stories of the Chittywicks. Rents in Ridingdale were not

high, and the Chittywicks, as became their pretensions to gentility, lived in one of several big old houses that had stood in the High Street from the beginning of the century—houses that seemed to have no right to be found among so many shops. The Chittywick mansion was detached and had a fair garden lying behind it, but (we are speaking of the days when he was in business) William's clog-shop was, practically, next door.

It is superfluous to say that the two families were not on visiting terms, yet there were times when the Chittywicks found the Lethers very useful. When Mrs. Chittywick, during the absence of Mr. Chittywick whose travelling naturally kept him away from home a great deal, discovered herself to be without "change," it was natural that she should look to Mrs. Lethers for a loan. There were times when the loan was repaid; but it is certain that Mrs. Chittywick thought Mrs. Lethers somewhat honoured by being permitted to lend money to so distinguished a family.

The two Miss Chittywicks completely ignored both William and his wife, but to their disgust their brother Charlie was very friendly with the Lethers. Scarcely a day passed but he would stroll into the shop for a chat, and he would now and then drop into the little back-parlour, and sometimes of an evening play a game of draughts with one of William's lads. Nor would Master Charlie refuse an invitation to tea or supper. Mrs. Lethers declared the lad was "half clammed," and sometimes he certainly looked it. It was in vain that his sisters protested against this lowering

of the family dignity. Charlie declared that William was a very good sort and so was his wife.

At this period of Charlie's life he was struggling, struggling daily, with a monster most dreaded by the natural man, or boy—Hunger. Consequently, any person, any house, that gave promise of food was cultivated by the loafer. What a long time it seemed since his father's bankruptcy and the giving up of the school! Yet it was only two years since he had sat down to four good meals a day; for whatever may have been the quality of the mental food imparted to his pupils, Mr. Chittywick did not starve their bodies.

What a time it had been, Charlie often thought—these two years of loafing and starving! If only he could stop growing! If only he could get something to do that would suffice to bring him regular meals! If only one or two people would forgive and forget the delinquencies of those two years! If only the circle of his friends would not narrow so pitifully.

Friends! Did he possess a single one? William Lethers and his wife were still tolerant of him; but how long would it last? On a certain December day just before Christmas, Charlie had to face the hard fact that only three shops in Ridingdale were open to him—Colpington's, the chemist's, Miss Rippell's, and William Lethers.' And of these three only one—the clogger's—was of much advantage. Colpington was a man of uncertain temper, and though it was not Charlie's fault that the chemist's offer to

work had been refused, the boy was now very shy of entering the shop.

Miss Rippell was kind, but then her shop was nearly always haunted by ladies. His sisters too, he reflected, gave the Berlin-wool warehouse as much of their company as it could reasonably stand, and both of them strongly objected to his presence.

Shabby! of course he was shabby. Approaching fourteen, he was still wearing the clothes of a twelve-year-old boy. Not a single new article of dress, saving one pair of shoes, had he been able to get since the break-up. "Not fit to be seen," his sisters told him daily and unnecessarily. "Anyhow, I keep myself clean," was his retort, and this he did.

When he could possibly avoid it, he would keep clear of the very gates of the Armstrong house. It was one thing to meet little Freddy by accident, and quite another thing to hang about in the hope of getting a stray cake or a slice of bread-and-butter. Of late the little chap had changed his tactics. If on his way to school he met the loafer, he would no longer offer him his *nuncheon*, as he called it; but at twelve o'clock he would pray that he might meet Charlie on his way home. It was in vain that Charlie reasoned and remonstrated and finally took care to keep out of the child's way. Freddy regularly saved his morning snack, and if it did not reach Charlie's hands sooner or later the donor was not at fault. He was a resourceful and a masterly child. For some time past small parcels had

turned up in unexpected places or reached Charlie through strange and sometimes unwashed hands.

"I don't want it, Charlie, I really don't," Freddy said stoutly when Charlie remonstrated. "Faver says I'm getting too fat, and muvver stuffs me too much."

Charlie laughed. The plump and rosy youngster certainly did not look hungry. It was a sturdy, well-fed, warmly-clad little figure that stood in the December slush and looked up into the loafer's face. Everything about the child spoke of comfort and plenty. Half-enviously, and yet with a certain affection, Charlie scanned the child—from the tuft of his Glengarry cap to the inch-thick soles of his hobnailed highlows. Through Charlie's thin and broken shoes the muddy snow found way at every step.

"But you'll be found out, Freddy, and then—"

"I don't care. Muvver gives it to me for my very own and I can't—I don't eat it."

"But your father would be in an awful wax—and you'd get *whacks*—if he knew."

"I don't care. But he won't know."

"I shan't tell him," laughed Charlie beginning to demolish the mince-pie Freddy had just handed to him. The little boy was delighted to see his hero enjoying "a happy month"—as the dainty was called in Ridingdale.

"We break up the day after to-morrow," Freddy said gleefully.

"Jolly!" responded Charlie, but his face fell a little.

"But you've got to have twelve happy months, Charlie

I shall beg 'em of mother. Not all at once, but one now and then. And if I don't meet you down town I'll put 'em in that little place behind your gate—I mean the yard gate. *You* know. Where I put that little pork-pie yesterday."

"Don't, Freddy! You'll be getting into a row. I don't want you to be licked through me. I should be miserable if I thought you were being whipped. It's awfully good of you; but don't."

"O, it's all right," said the youngster sturdily. "I don't care. Are you going home to dinner now, Charlie?"

"Yes," replied Charlie with some hesitation. There would be bread and tea at one o'clock, he knew, and not nearly enough bread. What his mother called a remittance had not been received from Mr. Chittywick for several weeks. Charlie doubted if there was fire enough to-day to boil the kettle. He had left his mother wrapped in a blanket and reading a novel.

"Why don't you put your big coat on?" Freddy asked, for Charlie was shivering.

"Won't go on. Split right up the back first time I tried it this winter. I'm all right though. Ta-ta, Freddy! Thanks muchly for the pie. It's mighty good!"

To Charlie, the mere thought of Christmas was an agony. Last year he had helped at the grocer's, had enjoyed the bustle of the week preceding the great feast, had earned a little money and much tuck. This year, Harwood's was closed to him; he scarcely dared to stop and examine the holly-decked, raisin-spread window. It was the same at the

confectioner's—perhaps worse, for the shopman actually kept a handy cane for the chastisement of undesirable boy-loafers about the window, and the proprietor himself—well, Charlie knew something of the strength of the confectioner's arm. There were two bakers in High Street, and even when Charlie approached them, money in hand, for the loaf that barely kept his mother and sisters from starvation—once he was served these sellers of bread showed an unblushing anxiety to see him off the premises.

Last Christmas Day, he and his mother and sisters had dined at Miss Rippell's: he wondered much if she would ask them again this year. Certainly, he was not fit to go where there was company. His boots would have been refused by a tramp. If only he could get a pair of boots, he told himself, he would run away. There must be something for a boy to do somewhere in the world—in some place where he was not known. But in his present condition every step out of doors was painful, and running away impossible.

A few days before Christmas he caught a violent cold. He was glad of the excuse for staying in bed: between the blankets he could at least keep warm. The very sight of High Street, of the shops, of the errand-boys, of the cheery bustle of approaching Christmas, had become maddening. He had been too hungry, too weak, too spiritless, to return the chaff of those stout burly lads who were carrying about the baskets of good things to decent householders. He would gladly have changed places with any one of these velveteen-coated, clog-shod fellows. How warm and jolly

they looked! Snow and slush could not penetrate the solid wood and thick leather that protected their feet; winter winds were defied by overcoats of frieze and comforters of scarlet wool.

Poor Charlie! He was a prodigal indeed, for no man would hire him. A prodigal, though, through being the son of a prodigal. Want had come to him through no fault of his own. Only one thing had he himself squandered—his own reputation. This precious commodity he had recklessly flung away. “Liar and thief” were the words that now sprang readily to the lips of men with whom he had once been a favourite. He was of course handicapped by being a son of his father—a man known throughout the Dale as a swindler and a “dead-nab;” yet there were God-fearing men, even in the High Street, who did not readily blame the son for his father’s sins. Charlie himself had sinned and had been found out. Sometimes in his misery and his loneliness he told himself that if the school had succeeded, if his father had gone on giving much good custom to the local shops, he, Charlie Chittywick, would still have been the favourite of Ridingdale tradesmen. In this he did some of them an injustice. When his father’s bankruptcy came about, most of the creditors remained friendly with the debtor’s son. The one exception was Mr. Armstrong.

Up to the age of twelve there had been no more popular boy in Ridingdale than Charlie Chittywick. It was not merely that he was good-looking, well-mannered, and well-

dressed; he was pleasant to deal with—respectful and intelligent—good-humoured and affable—the kind of boy that makes friends and keeps them.

But then—up to that time he had never known what it was to be hungry. His life had been a pleasant one. The boys of his father's school were devoted to him. Younger than some of them, none could excel him either in class or play-ground.

Not quite two years had brought about this appalling difference. As he lay in bed on Christmas Eve he reflected that he had only two friends left in the whole world—the clogger next door and a little child of seven and a half! And the latter was the son of his father's—of his own—deadliest enemy!

CHAPTER III.

'A DETERMINED RESOLVE.

On a certain January night when snow lay on the ground, William was just about to shut up shop and retire to his easy-chair when Charlie Chittywick suddenly appeared in the doorway. Something in the lad's face startled Billy Lethers.

"Whatever is the matter, Master Charlie?"

The boy sauntered to the counter and sat down.

"Look here, Mr. Lethers, I want you to do me a favour. You are about the only friend I've got in the world, and I'll never forget your kindness to me—I might say to us. You are always doing us favours and I'm ashamed to ask you for anything for myself, but I'll pay you back in a week or two—I will indeed. I want you to let me have a pair of clogs on trust.

"What, for yourself, Master Charlie?" asked the amazed William.

"Yes, for myself. I'm sick and tired of this kind of sham life we are leading at home and I simply can't stand it any longer. I'm going to Hardlow to-morrow morning to try and get on at the factory there."

"You'll niver do no sich thing—surely!" William exclaimed.

"But I *will*!" the lad declared fiercely. "I must. We're pretty nearly starving, and my sisters won't do anything. Father has come home with next to nothing and we're in debt all over the place. I can tell you what I wouldn't tell anybody else. Somebody must do something. Somebody's got to make a move. My mother *can't* do anything. I'm fourteen now, and I'm quite able to work. If I can only keep myself it will be one less at home."

"But you'll niver go t' factory, my lad," argued William.

"It's the only thing I can do. I've got no education. I'm far more ignorant than your sons, Mr. Lethers, yet they don't pretend to be educated. I couldn't write a decent letter in English, let alone any other language, to save my life. In an office I should be a mere dummy even if anybody would take me on. I tried Lawyer South the other day, but he put me off—simply because he saw that my handwriting was vile. No, Mr. Lethers, I'm determined to go to the factory, and if you'll let me have a pair of clogs I'll be awfully grateful. What is more, I'll pay you for them as soon as ever I can."

"But you've niver wore sich things i' your life," said William.

"No, and more's the pity. My grandfather never wore anything else, and my father wore them when he was a lad. Why shouldn't I? We're not gentle-folk, Mr. Lethers: you know that very well. And if we were, I don't see why we should not work—why we should live on others."

William's mind was divided between amazement and ad-

miration. He had always liked Charley, and Jane had always said he was "the best o' the bunch;" but this sudden resolution, this determined revolt against the family pride, was to be met with caution.

"Of coorse, my lad, you shall 'ave a pair o' clogs if you want 'em," William said. "But you mun think well what you're doin'. You munna act in a 'urry. I doubt me your mother and sisters 'ud never stand the sight o' ye i' clogs. An' as for workin' at t' factory—"

"Look here, Mr. Lethers!" the lad interrupted passionately, "if I don't get work I shall do something bad. I can feel it in me. I shall do something that will make them ashamed of me and of themselves, something that will break my mother's heart. You're a good man and I can trust you as I would a priest. Well, I don't mind confessing to you that I *very* nearly stole a pair of boots last night. They were hanging outside Rompton's shop and I saw they were just my size. There was nobody about and I could have hooked them easily. I wanted them so very badly. Look at the state I'm in, and all this snow on the ground!" he exclaimed showing two worn and broken shoes saturated with wet. "Look at my clothes too! This is the only suit I've got, and I brush it till I'm afraid it'll fall to bits. Sleeves and trousers both a couple of inches short! My shirt is in rags and my socks are full of holes. My sisters are too busy, or too something, to mend 'em. What can I do! I can't help growing, can I? I can't help being a boy and getting hungry—"

Whether it was William's kind look or gesture, or whether it was that nerve failure that comes from want of food, the voluble lad suddenly broke down and began to sob piteously.

William immediately moved towards the parlour-door.

"Got owt 'ot for supper, my lass?" he asked his wife. Jane was in the kitchen beyond, but the hiss of frying sausages answered him. However, he stepped forward, and in a few words told her what was happening in the shop.

"I alus said that lad was well nigh clammed," she whispered. "Let him come in and fill his belly—poor fellow! I'll send Jack for another half-pound. We can be goin' on wi' these 'ere."

William hurried back to the shop.

"Come an' 'ave a bit o' supper, Master Charlie," he said soothingly. "No, don't say another word till you've 'ad summat to eat. We'll talk things o'er a bit arter that. Nay, don't yer cry, my lad! That wunna 'elp matters." William put his hand caressingly on the boy's shoulder. The tears burst forth afresh.

"How I wish," the lad sobbed, "I had been your son. Or even your apprentice. I'd be your errand-lad if you'd let me—I would really." And the grateful lad seized William's hand and pressed it between his own cold palms.

"There—there! Now, dry your eyes, my lad! Missis is a waitin' for us. So is t' sausages. 'Ot sausages, Mas-

ter Charlie! Just the things for a night like this—eh? You'll feel better arter a bit o' supper."

Very willingly, in spite of his tear-stained face, did Charlie suffer himself to be led to the parlour. The shop was always filled with a pleasant healthy odour of wood and leather, but the opening of the parlour-door brought to the nostrils of the hungry boy a far more savoury and heartening smell.

Jane's heart was moved to pity as she looked at the lad's pinched face and tear-marked cheeks. "You're 'arf perished, child," she said, taking his hand and rubbing it between her own. "An' I'll be bound your feet's as wet as they can be—aren't they now?"

"They are, indeed, Mrs. Lethers," he admitted. "But please don't bother about me. I'm used to wet feet."

"Yes," answered Jane, "and so is t' churchyard. Come in t' kitchen a minute. I've got some clean socks a airin,' and you can 'ave Jack's slippers."

"I'd rather have his *clogs* if you don't mind, Mrs. Lethers," said the boy with a certain earnestness that made her look at him curiously. "I'm going to have a pair of my own, and I'd like to get used to them."

"I'll get 'em for you now," William said going back into the shop and returning with two or three pairs slung over his arm. "This 'll be t' pair I'm thinkin'," he said as he knelt down before the lad who had already changed his sopping socks. "An' you stick to them stockings, Master

Charlie. Missis 'll be delighted. They're thick and warm, and our lads 'ave got 'eaps of 'em."

"You *are* good!" the boy ejaculated, as he stood up with one foot in the new clog, and declared that it fitted beautifully. "How nice they feel!" he exclaimed, when he had put on the other one and walked the length of the kitchen. "They make you feel fit for anything! I thought they'd be ever so heavy, but they're not!"

"Things isn't allis what they looks like," laughed William. "You're not the fust as 'as bin deceived about t' weight of 'em, my lad. But come and 'ave thee supper! I'm thinkin' them sausages is as good as they looks!"

In his unwonted footgear Charlie stepped gingerly into the little parlour and took his seat at the table. He could have cried again for sheer happiness. The two sons of the house and an apprentice—another apprentice boarded with his own friends—came in from the workshop at the back, the place where all the making and mending went on, and the plentiful supper became a merry meal.

What could be more hearty, more genuine and honest, than all this? Charlie asked himself again and again. What would he give to be one of William's apprentices? There was no room for sham in a life of this sort. There was no affectation, no pretension, no dishonesty. And there was *love*—parental and filial love!

Charlie knew that neither in height nor weight was he what a boy of his years should be. He contrasted himself with Jack Lethers who was also fourteen. Why Jack, was

a young giant compared with himself! And this in spite of Jack's close application to his father's trade and the confined atmosphere of a shop! How happy he and his brother looked and how proud of them were Jane and William Lethers. What good lads they were, too!—everybody said it. Regular at Mass, regular at their duties. Working all day—playing a little when night came—resting on Sundays and holidays. Was it not a life that any boy or man might be glad and proud to live!

The very room they were sitting in glowed with a homely cheeriness. It was not merely the sight of that great dish of sausages, or the bed of mashed potatoes upon which they lay, the half-stone loaf whose proportions seemed to defy the knife of the hungriest boy that ever lived, or the huge segment of cheese, fresh from a Dale farmhouse, that looked as if it never could grow less—though to a badly-fed lad like Charlie Chittywick such a table could not but be a grateful sight; but a quite undefinable and utterly indescribable look of home was upon the whole establishment. In the coloured picture of little Red Ridinghood and that of the robin redbreast in the holly bush there was a friendliness that could be felt. The very fire seemed to burn as though it were enjoying its own activity and rejoicing in its own heat. Both William and Jane were at this time in the prime of life, and though she always held in reserve a certain asperity of tongue and severity of manner, she was the perfect housewife and a most devoted mother. William was—just William. His character through life had

been uniformly kind and gentle. He had brought with him into the world a good heart, and taking this natural gift—not less the gift of God, remember, because it was natural—grace had worked upon it, purified and elevated it. There are no such things as faultless men in this world, therefore he was not faultless: but if charity covers a multitude of sins it may very well conceal natural imperfections and faults of character.

When the meal was over, William took his pipe and with the lads retired to the warm and well-lighted workshop at the back, while Mrs. Lethers cleared the table and made the cosy parlour a few degrees more cosy. There was a bagatelle-board, and a variety of indoor games. Jack treated the visitor to a flute solo or two—"Wait for the waggon and we'll all take a ride," "Nellie Bly," and "Willie we have missed you." William played a game of cribbage with Charlie—interspersed with many encouraging remarks to the musician. But when the short game was over, host and guest went back to the parlour leaving the lads to their music and play. For William and Charlie had business to discuss.

Sitting in front of the fire, with Jane sewing on one side of the hearth and William smoking on the other, Charlie told them of his plans.

"Things are getting worse and worse at home," he said. "Father talks of throwing up his present job and going in for some dry goods agency. Mother is in very bad health and this cold weather tries her awfully. Lavinia has got

only two music pupils, and one of them is to stop coming next week. Maud is doing something in the needlework line for Miss Rippell, but there is a heap of Maud's things lying on Miss Rippell's counter. They don't sell, and Miss Rippell can't afford to pay for them till she sells them. So you see, Mrs. Lethers, I must, I really *must* do something. Colpington would have taken me a month or two ago as shop-boy, and I would have gone like a shot only mother cried and carried on so and said I was determined to disgrace the family. Just as if it *could* be disgraced more than it is!"

"Why Colpington would a learnt you t' business," said Mrs. Lethers. "An' surely nowt could be more respectable than a druggist's shop!"

"Aye," put in William, "that'd a' bin t' very thing for you, lad. A sight better and nicer than t' factory."

"Yes, I know," said the boy a little bitterly. "But I've lost my chance. He's got young Winfield now. He said he'd teach me everything and help me a bit with my Latin of a night. Mr. Colpington is quite an educated man, you know. It was just the very thing. I could have been a chemist's assistant at any rate, even if I had never been able to set up in business. But it's no use thinking of it now. And it would be the same if I could get a similar job in any other shop. Mother wouldn't let me take it. Poor mother! I don't want to hurt her, but I must. If I lived at Hardlow, perhaps she wouldn't feel it as much. They'd give me eight shillings a week to begin with and I should

soon be getting ten. I've talked it over with a Hardlow lad. He says they want fresh hands just now. And you see my grandfather worked there all his life: I don't think they'd refuse me."

The more they discussed the matter the more evident it became both to Jane and William that, for the present at any rate, Charlie's only chance of getting work was at the factory. They both, for several reasons, regretted it. As for the boy himself, it was clear that he had fully made up his mind. Sitting there in front of the fire he stretched out his legs and looked smilingly and admiringly upon his new clogs. A fool would have told him that they were the badge of servitude—the weighty fetters of slavery; that from the moment he appeared in public shod with wood and iron he would lose caste, and take up an inferior and despised position for evermore.

Some twelve or fourteen years later a fool did say this—not to, but within the hearing of the newly-arrived Squire of Riddingdale and his wife. They had just been married, had just taken possession of the Hall, and they were not fools. "If we are blessed with children, my darling," said the husband, "shall we try to teach the Dale a lesson?" "By all means, dear," Mrs. Riddingdale answered. They taught the Dale many lessons subsequently; but even if they had been at the Hall at this period, it may be doubted if the Chittywicks would have profited by the example of the Squire and his wife. "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in the mortar, as when a pestle striketh upon sodden

barley, his folly would not be taken from him"—says the inspired Book.

Charlie was only a boy of fourteen, but he was no fool. To him that pair of clogs was the symbol of honest labour and noble effort. As he felt the grip of the stout leather on his ankles and tapped the solid sole of wood and iron on the hearthrug, he respected himself as he had never done before. The clog had never been the badge of servitude in the Dale, nor had it ever been the emblem of poverty. But if it had been both Charlie would have worn it. There are things infinitely worse than either poverty or servitude.

"When did you think of starting, Master Charlie?" William asked.

"To-morrow morning, Mr. Lethers," the boy answered promptly. "I shall get up early and try to be at the factory by nine o'clock. The office opens then. I shan't say anything to mother until things are settled. You see, it's of no use. And of course I shan't tell my sisters. I know I'm doing the right thing. If I can lodge with my grandmother at Hardlow so much the better."

"You'd niver be able to come 'ome ivery neet, child," said Mrs. Lethers.

"I think I could—later on. But that depends on mother. When the days get longer I could manage it. I can walk it in an hour—it's hardly four miles. But if I once begin to work at the factory I fancy they won't want me to go home, except now and then."

"What'll your father say?" William inquired.

“O, he won’t mind. In fact he’ll be glad—especially if I don’t bother him about it. He was very angry with my mother for not letting me go to Colpington’s. I know he wants me to work, and he doesn’t particularly care what I do.”

Jane and William looked at one another in astonishment. It seemed an extraordinary state of things. Yet they knew very well the kind of man Mr. Chittywick was. He was seldom at home, and even if he came to Riddingdale for a week end, he spent most of his time in the bar-room of “The Arms.”

The grandmother Charlie had referred to was his father’s mother. Completely ignored by Mrs. Chittywick and her daughters, and seldom visited by her own son, Charlie never found himself in the neighborhood of Hardlow without paying her a call. For years she had been a widow, living by herself in a little cottage of her own. Very bitter towards her son’s wife and daughters, she doated upon Charlie, and the hope that she might have a spare bed-room and receive him as a lodger had greatly helped him in the making of his resolution. Like her son, she was a Protestant.

It has been said that Jane and William Lethers regretted the necessity of Charlie’s going to Hardlow. They were sorry of course that a boy with his up-bringing should be compelled to work in a factory; but what they most regretted was the fact that at Hardlow there was neither church nor priest. As we have said, even at Riddingdale there was not at this time a resident priest, for we are deal-

ing with a period long anterior to the coming of Father Horbury. Still the Catholics of the Dale could always rely on Sunday Mass.

Whatever knowledge of his religion Charlie had he had picked up for himself—chiefly in conversation with the Lethers.' Beyond a few prayers, his mother had taught him nothing. He had several times been to confession, but he had not made his First Communion. William knew that his attendance at Sunday Mass had been very irregular—as was that of Mrs. Chittywick and her daughters. Latterly, however, at William's suggestion, the boy had roused himself early on Sunday morning and, disregarding the shabbiness of his clothes, had stolen out of the sleeping house to be present at the first Mass. The attendance of the ladies at late Mass depended entirely upon the condition of their wardrobe.

Under these circumstances, Jane and William were naturally anxious about the lad's spiritual welfare. However, for the present they had to put the question by. Mrs. Lethers was to-night keenly concerned in his immediate temporal needs. The thin cotton socks Charlie had taken off were so full of holes that she had thrown them away. Her motherly heart and brain were at work trying to devise some scheme for finding out the real state of his belongings. She felt morally certain that he had scarcely a shirt to his back. That he only possessed one suit of clothes she knew, and this did not include an overcoat. Though they had reached mid-winter he was still wearing a straw hat.

But Jane had many of the delicate instincts of a true gentlewoman and she did not like to put to the boy questions that reflected upon his home life. Calling her husband out of the room she suggested that he should in the course of a private chat with Charlie find out there and then what were the lad's greatest needs. William was of course to be very discreet, not to say diplomatic.

The good Yorkshireman was not skilled in the art of *finesse*, but his subsequent report to Jane in the privacy of the back kitchen sent her straight upstairs to the opening of drawers, the inspection of flannel shirts and woolen socks.

Nine o'clock struck and the lads came in from the shop. Mrs. Lethers came downstairs and immediately took up a big old copy of the *Garden of the Soul*. The oldest lad read night prayers, and Charlie joined in them heartily and thankfully. When the boys had gone to bed Charlie felt that he ought to say good-night. But Mrs. Lethers had not done with him.

He was to breakfast with them to-morrow morning, she said, before he started. If he didn't mind carrying it she would have a carpet-bag packed with a few—she hesitated but called them “useful things.” He needn't bring anything from home unless he liked. She hinted that the bulk of his linen might be at the wash.

Charlie blushingly expressed his gratitude. He felt sure that she knew his woeful lack of everything necessary. To-morrow he would have to take off his coat, and even

the sleeves of the shirt he had on were in tatters. He asked that he might leave his clogs with them that night, as he did not want to excite the suspicion of his mother and sisters.

When he got home he found that his mother had retired for the night. His sisters were in the drawing-room, each of them deep in a novel. They scarcely looked up when he entered, but when he turned to leave the room and go to bed he paused for a moment to remark: "I'm going over to Hardlow to-morrow morning. I'll get some breakfast before I start. Shan't be back for dinner. May sleep at grandmother's to-morrow night. I shall see. Good-night."

Both sisters were so absorbed with the entangled love affairs of a romantic countess that, though each looked up for a moment to say good-night, neither of them paid much attention to what Charlie said. For several years he had led his own life—attending no school since the break-up of his father's "seminary"—making now and then an attempt to study by himself, but going and coming just as he pleased and showing a fine disregard for the irregular meal-times of an irregular household. In fine weather he would often start out in the early morning after taking a cup of milk, with a big hunch of bread in one pocket and a book in the other, and only return home at sunset. He had long ago been made to realize that the less he "bothered" his mother and sisters and the oftener he was away from home, the better pleased they were. Where he went, and

what he did, they rarely inquired. So long as he did not disgrace the family by consorting with "clog-people," they were satisfied.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW HAND.

Supper the night before had been an ample and a merry meal, but breakfast the next morning was fully equal to it. And equal to the breakfast was Charlie. The occasion was a momentous one, and Mrs. Lethers had made up her mind that it demanded a monumental meal.

It was a little after half-past seven when Charlie started for Hardlow—a raw morning and a dark one. His mother and sisters would not rise for another hour or two.

William had warned him that his first long walk in a new pair of clogs might cause him discomfort, and that he had better give himself plenty of time.

“Ah, Mr. Lethers, if you only knew the misery of walking about in all this snow and slush with a pair of shoes that let in water at every step—but, of course, you don’t. I shall soon get used to the clogs, and I’m only too thankful to have them. Besides, Mrs. Lethers has made me put on a pair of lambswool socks, and I feel as if I were walking in velvet.”

Mrs. Lethers would not hear of his starting without an overcoat, and the carpet-bag she handed him at the last moment bulged with—he knew not what. And in her presence he could not open it.

In spite of the gloom of the morning he felt boisterously happy. He was warm without and within, and O, the difference it made! In trying to thank his benefactors for their goodness to him he had not been able to keep back his tears, and he had given Mrs. Lethers the parting kiss that he would fain have bestowed upon his own mother; but now that he was on the road he could have danced and shouted like a newly-emancipated slave. He felt half sorry that the state of the ground deadened the click-clack of his clogs; such a sound would have been music to him in his present mood. And if all Ridingdale had assembled to watch his departure he would have rejoiced. One or two errand-lads passed him on their way and, to his delight, stopped to eye him curiously. Ridingdale people would soon know what he had done.

At five minutes past nine by the office-clock another person was eying Charlie very curiously—the manager of the factory.

“You don’t look over-strong,” Mr. Paleworthy was saying.

“I’m stronger than I look, sir,” Charlie answered.

“Have you had any illness lately?”

“Only a bad cold, sir, and it’s better now.”

Mr. Paleworthy looked the lad over—from his thin pale face crowned with brown curly locks, to the brass-tipped toes of his small clogs.

“You are rather short for fourteen.”

“I shall grow, sir,” said Charlie.

The man laughed good-naturedly.

“And you say you are the grandson of old George Chittywick who worked for us so many years?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, he was a very good servant. I believe he came here when the factory was first started—nearly sixty years ago!”

The manager went on putting questions to Charlie. The boy blushed when he was asked what his father did. The fact was that the manager was a little puzzled. The lad standing before him spoke nicely and had a refined face, and he was wondering that such a boy should be willing to become a factory-hand. However, the entrance of the letter-bag brought the interview to an end.

“Just show this boy the way into the factory,” he said to the clerk who had brought the bag. “Go and see the foreman, my lad,” turning to Charlie. “They are pretty busy just now and he is sure to have a job for you.”

The astonishment of Grandmother Chittywick when, a little after one o'clock that same day, Charlie knocked at her door, was considerable. But when he told her that he had got work at the factory, and called her attention to his unmistakable footgear, she declared that she didn't know whether she was standing on her head or her heels. As a matter of fact she had dropped down into the nearest chair and looked “fair moidered,” as she afterwards expressed it. Charlie laughed and opened Mrs. Lethers' bag. As he

expected, it contained a dinner — and much more. It had two compartments, and one was filled with shirts and socks. In the other there was a beefsteak pie, a big wedge of cheese, half a loaf of bread and some tea and sugar. With great glee he placed these things on the table saying that if grandmother didn't mind he'd like to have his dinner. Then Mrs. Chittywick literally rose to the occasion.

It was a clean and cosy cottage, and there was a good fire burning. She put the pie in the oven to let it warm through, and in a very few minutes Charlie sat down to a comfortable dinner. When she realized that her grandson wanted to become her lodger, she wept for joy.

Of course she had a spare bed-room, she said. And what a lucky thing it was she had refused to let it only the week before, because she had heard that the man who wanted it was often in drink. But what *did* his mother think of it all, and what *would* his sisters say?

The necessity of being back at the factory by two o'clock had been duly impressed upon Charlie by the foreman, and long before the time, he was ready to start. But granny reminded him that he was well within five minutes' walk of the ponderous gate that opened and shut with such severe regularity.

Light and quite mechanical was the job that had been given him, making very little demand either upon brain or muscle. But it was tiring and monotonous, and the incessant rattle of machinery sounded in his ears long after six o'clock brought the "loosing time." The new life was a

big change for him in every particular. His old Ridingdale existence had been almost Bohemian. Lounging had become a second nature to him; he had no duties, no fixed hour for study, no one to talk to unless he killed a little time, as he frequently did, at the counter of Miss Rippell or that of Colpington the chemist. An occasional ride in the butcher's or baker's cart made an event for him. Indeed, the baker's cart had a fascination for him that he would have been ashamed to admit, though latterly and for good reasons, he had avoided it.

Poor Charlie! his conscience sadly needed overhauling. The temptation to steal the boots had been a very strong one, and when he thought of it he turned hot and cold all over: but this was rather at the realization of almost certain detection and the consequent punishment and disgrace. It was not many weeks since a lad of his own age had stolen a pair, and Charlie had stood near the lock-up door with a group of idlers to watch the young culprit being put into the cart that stood waiting to convey him to gaol. The scene had made a great impression upon Charlie, for just as the policeman was getting into the cart a woman had run up sobbing bitterly. She had tried to get into the conveyance, but they would not let her. Then her son had leant over the side to kiss her, telling her not to cry and that he would be back again in a month. But the cart drove off with a sobbing prisoner and left behind it a heart-broken mother. This, rather than the fear of offending God, had

helped Charlie to overcome the most violent temptation he could remember.

For if the truth must be told his petty thefts had become habitual and he had stolen eatables with very little compunction. Apples and fruit he regarded as quite fair game; though more than once he had been caught and made to writhe under the lash of a horse-whip. He had become quite dexterous in the "hooking," as he would have called it, of buns and pies and tarts, and any edible flotsam and jetsam that came in his way. In the course of a long ride in the Dale delivering bread, the baker discovered that Charlie had by degrees eaten a small loaf. The man said very little. He guessed that the lad was tortured with hunger, but he did not like pilfering and thought it better to say so. Charlie was ashamed at being found out, just as he would have been ashamed to ask for bread; but thanks to the callous and almost criminal neglect of his parents, his moral sense, in this particular matter at least, was considerably blunted.

For since the time his father had given up keeping school, Charlie had never known what it was to be regularly and properly fed. Mr. Chittywick had not starved the bodies of his boarders, whatever may have been lacking in the mental nutriment doled out to them. Indeed if any parent had wanted a school wherein his boys might be well fed and permitted the maximum of play with the minimum of work, nothing could have been better than Mr. Chittywick's academy. But even in the sixties there were fathers and

mothers who did not appreciate an establishment of this kind.

That Charlie had reached his teens without becoming the inmate of a gaol or a reformatory was little less than a miracle. He belonged to a criminal class quite as truly and really as a burglar's apprentice. Ever since their marriage his parents had lived by fraud. In spite of his pretensions, no honest man would employ Mr. Chittywick. Whatever was shady in the way of business attracted him, whether wine or jewellery or patent medicines. Yet somehow he maintained a decent personal appearance, and he had more than once been mistaken for a clergyman. His silk hat was always glossy, his frock coat was well-fitting and carefully brushed. As he walked down the High Street and entered his half-furnished house, he held his head much higher than any of the well-to-do tradesmen whose shops he despised, but with whom he condescended to drink in the sacred seclusion of the bar-room of "The Arms."

"I have never once seen Chittywick really drunk," said Colpington to his neighbour one night as they were leaving the bar-room. "No," said the latter, "and you can't honestly say that you've ever seen him sober."

CHAPTER V.

THE WEEK END.

When Saturday noonday came Charlie could scarcely contain himself for sheer delight. He had money in his pocket, money that he had *earned*. He possessed six shillings, and some coppers that he was too overjoyed to count—five or six, he thought, if not more. Some of the lads with whom he worked lingered about the yard. They had small debts to discharge or receive, appointments to make or differences to arrange. Charlie ran at full speed to his grandmother's cottage, making much clog-music on the asphalted pavement.

A holiday of a day and a half—the half being a generous one! Go to Ridingdale of course he must and would. They should at any rate have the opportunity of seeing him at home, and he wanted much to see his mother and Mr. and Mrs. Lethers. Whether under the circumstances his mother would ask him to stay with her until Monday morning, at any rate until Sunday night, remained to be seen. He did not think she would, but she should have the chance.

But first of all he was anxious to discharge his debt to his grandmother. He felt that if he gave her all he had earned he would still owe her something; but then, next

week would be a full one and eight shillings would be due to him. To his surprise, she would take nothing on the present occasion. Next week, she said, they would see about it. It was a poor thing if she couldn't take in her own grandson for a week or two, she declared, and as for food—why he'd brought half a week's victuals with him. She reminded him that the cottage was her own, so that she had no rent to pay, and the factory firm allowed her a pension that was quite enough for her keep. Moreover, she whispered, her husband had been a saving man and hadn't left her destitute.

All this astonished the boy very much. He had always supposed that she was poor and that one reason why his father so seldom visited her was that he had nothing to give her. However, Charlie argued the point of board and lodging at length. He could not think of living upon her, he declared, and it would not be right. To pacify him she said he should pay for his board—next week, but that if she charged him anything for his lodging she would not be able to sleep comfortably in her bed. She reminded him that he was in debt for his clogs, and that he sadly wanted a new suit of clothes. This he could not deny. The suit of shiny black he was wearing was not at all the thing for factory wear, and he had already made up his mind to get a pair of cord trowsers as soon as ever he could. Moreover, he had no boots. A Sunday suit was one of those things that seemed to belong to the remote future.

Starting out for Ridingdale after he had had his dinner

he could not but speculate as to the kind of reception he would receive at home. He had written to his mother a firm but affectionate letter the very first night he spent at Hardlow, but he had received no answer to it. As a matter of fact, news of his working at the factory had reached Ridingdale before the letter, and the house of Chittywick had been filled with consternation, hysterics, and *sal volatile*. The Miss Chittywicks had heard a fearful report in Miss Rippell's shop. Miss Rippell's errand-boy had been told by another errand-boy that Charlie Chittywick had been seen that very morning in a pair of clogs! This was the form of the first rumour on the Tuesday afternoon, and the two Miss Chittywicks had to retire to Miss Rippell's parlour for brandy and water. The boy told a mate of his afterwards that "their screeches was awful." A little later in the afternoon a man from Hardlow factory came to the shop and being questioned by Miss Rippell said that a little chap named Chittywick has been taken on that very morning. The man said you couldn't make a mistake about a name like Chittywick and that he remembered the lad's grandfather very well. After this it became Miss Rippell's painful duty to put on her bonnet and hasten to break the awful news to Mrs. Chittywick.

It had been Charlie's intention to go home before calling on Mr. Lethers, but as he passed the shop William was just letting out a customer. Charlie rushed at William and seized his hand.

"Aye, but I'm reet glad to say thee, my lad!" exclaimed

the good clogger. "So'll Jane be. An' 'ow ast-a bin gettin' on like?"

Charlie poured himself out in a torrent of enthusiastic words—winding up by declaring that it was just stunning.

"But before I say any more, Mr. Lethers," the lad continued taking the money from his pocket, "I'm going to pay you for my clogs."

"Wait a bit, my lad, wait a bit now! I want to talk t' thee. Put yoor money by a bit, I've got summat t' say t' thee. Yoor goin' t' see yoor mother o' course, an' I'm glad I catched sight o' thee fust. Yo munna goo i' clogs, my lad."

"But, Mr. Lethers, why not? It is such rot!" Charlie exclaimed pettishly. "And she might as well see me in them first as last."

"Yoor right. It is rot," William admitted, "but yo mun humour her a bit, Master Charlie."

"But I've got nothing else to put on. I'm sure you haven't been able to mend those old boots I left here."

"No," William admitted, "I looked at 'em agin, but they're past all mendin'. They'll 'ave to be mended wi' a new pair, as t' sayin' is."

Charlie looked at William in alarm.

"I say, Mr. Lethers, I really oughtn't to run into any more debt."

"There's different sorts o' debts," said William as he passed to that side of the shop where he kept his boots and shoes. "When a man, or a lad either, 'as got ivery pros-

pec' o' payin' for what he wants very bad—well, that debt's a' reet. Yo mun 'ave a pair o' shoes!"

Artful William was thinking of the Chittywick family—did wish Charlie to humour his mother; but the good man was thinking much more of the lad's attendance at Sunday Mass.

"These are very jolly " Charlie exclaimed. "They fit beautifully!"

He looked at the stout shoes, made in William's own shop, with great satisfaction. William explained that they were not fancy goods or machine-made articles, and that they would prove serviceable. Many lads wore them on Sundays, and when the sole and heel began to go the uppers were strong enough to be clogged for every-day use. Still William added, he had plenty of fancy stuff if Charlie preferred it. But the boy was more than satisfied.

William was convinced with difficulty that Charlie had dined, or that just at the moment he was unequal even to a snack; but he could not be permitted to go home, even on the promise of coming again, until he had seen Jane. Artful Jane and William!

Mrs. Lethers said that probably Charlie hadn't received his linen from the wash. A clean collar freshened up a boy wonderfully, and by the same token she had one in her hand. Very soon it was round Charlie's neck. In various small motherly ways she "titivated him up," as she called it, and it was a very presentable Charlie indeed, that a few minutes later, appeared in the Chittywick drawing-room.

Mrs. Chittywick was not there and the girls received him with a tornado of abuse. Now singly and now together, they called him all the bad names they had ever heard or read, with one or two that they invented on the spot. In vain the boy tried to make himself heard. "Where's mother?" he asked again and again, but it was like addressing and expecting to get an answer from the factory machinery, he thought. He turned away and ran upstairs to his mother's room.

Mrs. Chittywick was not in bed, but she explained with many tears that "ever since that fatal Tuesday she had been obliged to keep her room." Almost with the eloquence of her daughters she spoke of Charlie's "base desertion"—"the eternal disgrace of a highly-connected family"—"the outrage on decency her son had unblushingly committed"—"the deliberate dragging down of the family name, making it a by-word in the mouth of all the riff-raff in Ridingle"—and very much more to the same effect.

Charlie had kissed her when he entered the room, but she had scarcely looked at him. He now stood by her chair in silence. Bitter thoughts came to his mind and hard words rose to his lips, but with a big effort he restrained himself. Things were worse than he had anticipated. It was inevitable that in a few minutes Mrs. Chittywick would break down and renew her sobs and tears.

"Look at me, mother," he said at length, standing in front of her. "Look at me! This time last week I had scarcely a bit of shoe to my foot. I was much hungrier

than a workhouse lad. I was leading a lazier life than any lad in Ridingle. I hadn't a halfpenny in my pocket. To-day I am well-fed, well-shod, well looked after. I have money in my pocket. For the first time in my life I can call myself respectable."

Mrs. Chittywick hid her face in her handkerchief and moaned. "Respectable!" he thought he heard her ejaculate.

"Yes, mother," he said with a certain boyish sternness, "*respectable*. Look at me, mother, and see. Remember what the baker told you, mother. I don't want to hurt you, but I must say it. He said I was a thief. He was quite right. I *was* a thief. Other people could have told you the same. There is hardly a shop in Ridingle that I haven't thieved from. Do you call *that* respectable, mother? I was a thief and a liar. I always denied that I had taken anything. You believed me, of course. Nobody else could. Once at the grocer's they took me into a back room and searched me. My pockets were crammed with biscuits and cheese, but I swore that I had brought them from home. They locked me in the room and sent for the policeman. Luckily for me—and for you, mother—the man couldn't find him. They let me go and told me never to enter that shop again."

Mrs. Chittywick rocked herself to and fro in her chair, but the boy went on relentlessly.

"It is right, mother, that you should know the truth. I am not blaming you so much as my father, though of

course I blame myself most of all. I never stole until I was so hungry I didn't know what to do with myself. And I never took anything but eatables. More than once, mother, I have been whipped and beaten till I was black and blue for taking things from gardens and orchards. You remember that time you thought I had been out all night? I denied it of course, but it was quite true. I spent that night lying in Goodwin's stable with my hands strapped behind me and my legs chained to the manger. He caught me late at night in one of his plum-trees. It was not the first time he had caught me. He asked me if I would go to the lock-up or his stable, and of course I said the stable. Early in the morning, his wife came and unfastened me and let me go home. Mother, it is simply a miracle that I never got into the hands of the police! There's many and many a poor lad in prison, or in a reformatory, at this moment who has stolen much less than I have!"

If the boy had not been so accustomed to his mother's hysterical tears he would have desisted, but her unreasonableness made him reckless. To him indeed it seemed as though he were not blaming her even implicitly. He thought that to justify the step he had lately taken he must first of all denounce himself.

"Surely, surely, mother, it is better to be a factory-lad than a thief! It is better to work than to be idle and pretend to be *genteel*. If you only knew, mother, how sick of that word I am! It is on Lavinia's lips everlastingly. She might make plenty of money if she would only take up

the right kind of work. I've heard Miss Rippell say again and again that if my sisters would only knit stockings and really useful things she could keep them going all the year round. But it is not genteel, they say, and they work day after day at silly things that people wouldn't care to have even as gifts. However, I don't want to talk about them. I've come to tell you that I'm working at the factory and that I mean to go on working there. If you disown me I can't help it. I am sorry to hurt you, mother, but some day I was bound to say what I have just said. Tell me if you had rather I had not come home. I shall be in Ridingdale every Saturday, I hope, and if you want to see me I will always come to you."

He made as though he would leave her, and for the first time since he had come in she looked up and eyed him from head to foot.

"You look very—very respectable," she said in a surprised tone. "They told me you wore clogs. That was a mistake, I see."

"Not at all, mother. Of course I wear clogs, and am thankful to have them. But I needn't come here in them, you know."

"Don't—O, please don't, Charles!" she sobbed.

"Very well, mother. I must be getting back to Hardlow now—unless——" He waited to give her the opportunity of asking him to stay the night. Then he thought of his sisters and was almost glad when his mother made

no response. "Good-bye, mother," he said, taking her hand.

"You have broken my heart, Charles," she sobbed.

"I've done nothing of the kind, mother!" he said, trying not to speak angrily. "If I had stayed at home I might have done. Would you like me to come and see you on Saturdays or Sundays?" he asked in a gentler tone, taking her hand afresh. She made no reply and he walked slowly from the room. Going to his own bedroom he sat down and cried. He had always thought that his mother did not really love him: it seemed now as though she never wanted to see him again. It was some time before he pulled himself together and began to collect into a parcel the few books and odds and ends that he could call his own. When he had done this—it did not take long—he went quickly down-stairs and let himself out. At the half-door of William's shop, Charlie hesitated for a moment. Perhaps it would be better to go straight back to Hardlow. It was tea-time now, he thought, and he ought not to force them, as it were, to ask him in. But while he hesitated, Jane came down the street and literally drove him before her into the shop. She had seen him hesitate; she now saw that he had been crying.

As they passed through the shop, William was fitting a pair of clogs on the feet of a rosy-cheeked boy whose mother was showing great solicitude lest the new foot-gear should pinch her darling. The sight hurt Charlie like a blow. The rosy youngster stood up and his mother's hand

rested on his curly hair. She watched him with affectionate pride as he laughingly clanked from one end of the shop to the other. Charlie followed Mrs. Lethers into the parlour and shut the door, but he could not refrain from peeping through the half-curtained window. Yes, he thought he recognized the woman: he was glad that she had not noticed him. It was Farmer Goodwin's wife—the motherly creature who had come to the stable to him so early on a certain morning and set him at liberty.

How well he remembered that woeful night! He had slept at intervals — only to wake up with a start and find himself bound hand and foot. Long before the dawn the pains in his limbs were excruciating, for the man had made the straps very tight. His ankles were fastened with a horse's head-band, and the chain and block to which this was attached grated on the staple every time he moved his feet. And in the morning, Goodwin had said, "when he could see to use it properly," he would bring his horse-whip. How grateful Charlie had been to the pitying woman who released him, but how ashamed he would be to meet her again! He felt sure that she had not noticed him as he passed through the shop: she had been too much occupied with her son.

However, Mrs. Lethers had taken into her own kind custody the boy with a shameful past, and he sat down in the little back-parlour with a deep sigh of gratitude.

CHAPTER VI.

SATURDAY NIGHT.

Mrs. Lethers had been out for tea-cakes—"thirteen for sixpence and find your own butter," as William facetiously remarked when he came in and found her toasting them.

"Couldn't I help you with them, Mrs. Lethers?" Charlie asked. "I think my hands are quite clean."

William thought that if his guest helped to eat them the missis would be best pleased; but Jane resigned the toasting-fork gratefully.

"You don't look too 'ot," she said to Charlie, "and Saturday's a busy day wi' us." Liberally buttering the cakes she had already toasted she watched him with approval as he gently moved the fork about and took care not to burn her favourite dainty.

Saturday was a busy day in the clogger's establishment, and both Jane and her husband had to get up and leave their tea half-finished. In the shop behind Charlie could hear an incessant hammering. It would be late before the lads finished, William said. He had pledged himself to deliver certain goods by ten o'clock at the latest, and he rarely disappointed a customer. A good deal of work he put out to men who came for it and carried it to their own homes, for though he was the only master-clogger in Rid-

ingdale at that time, and did a large trade in clogs, he was never without orders for hand-made boots and shoes. For these he was said to charge "t' top price," but everybody admitted that both his materials and workmanship were first-rate. To have had a pair of boots made by William was in itself a claim to distinction. Very plain and very strong they were, quite strong enough (as William had said to Charlie) to be fitted with a wooden sole and taken for every-day wear when they had done a year's Sunday and holiday duty, for the uppers were said to be everlasting. Indeed in some families of boys the excellence of William's leather was a grievance. Tommie, aged thirteen, would be measured by William for a pair of Sunday boots. These he would wear until his growing foot refused to enter them. Then they would descend to his next brother Jim, who also would wear them on Sunday and feasts until they became too small for them. At this period, having been in use some two years, they would be showing signs of wear, but as mother was sure to decide that the uppers were as good as new—better in fact than some uppers she had known, they would be handed down to little Jack as a brand-new pair of clogs. And as little Jack well knew, the number of wooden soles and sets of irons they were capable of receiving was, to put it mildly, indefinite.

Charlie had been, for him, a little silent during tea. The recent interview with his mother had depressed him. He was conscious of a big pain—somewhere, he could not quite locate it. That Mr. and Mrs. Lethers should be constantly

called to the shop he regretted and at the same time rejoiced over. He was grateful to them for not asking him questions. The January night was closing in and he ought to be setting out for Hardlow. He had told his grandmother that he might not return till Sunday evening, but it was clear that his mother's door was closed against him. In their kindness, the Lethers might ask him to stay with them, but he could not do so. He did not think it would be right.

Returning to the parlour after serving a woman customer, Jane found him buttoning his overcoat and fingering his cap—a Glengarry that she had made for him herself as a substitute for the old straw hat.

“Goin’ in ’ome a bit?” she asked him.

“Not my next door home, Mrs. Lethers. No, they don’t want me. I’m not sure they’d let me stop all night if I asked them.” His voice broke a little at the end though he was trying to smile.

“Then wheer art tha’ gooin to, lad, this time o’ neet?”

Charlie did laugh now, though the tears stood in his eyes; it was only a little after five o’clock and Mrs. Lethers spoke as if it were nearing midnight.

“O, to Hardlow,” he said cheerily. “I can do it under the hour.”

Jane put down her teacup, took the cap from his hand, and unbuttoned and removed his overcoat. “Yo’re goin’ to no ’Ardlow this neet, my lad. Mek yourself content wi’

that. I know'd ow things 'd be. I tow'd William last neet they'd be fit t' turn thee out. An' I 'ad t' bed-clothes airin' all t' mornin'. We've plenty o' room for thee i' our 'ouse. An we shanna put thee i' a damp bed neither."

A great flood of gratitude filled the boy's soul. "Oh, Mrs. Lethers, you *are* good to me!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Aye," she retorted with a patiently affected asperity, "good for nowt y' mean."

Charlie made haste to laugh lest that choking feeling should return, and as he leant back in the rocking-chair in which she had put him as if he were her own child, he made the little parlour re-echo with mirth.

"What's t' matter now?" inquired William as he returned to his belated meal. "Is 'er mekkin' jokes, lad? Ow often does. Ow's a wonderful joker is Jane Lethers. Ow'd mek a dog laff sometimes, would Jane. I've niver 'eerd t' like o' my missis."

Jane gave her husband a playful push into his chair and told him to stop his mouth with "that"—*that* being a plateful of tea-cake that she had been keeping warm for him in the Dutch oven that stood before the fire.

Tears had no chance with Charlie after this, and he chatted gaily with William while the latter finished his tea, and Mrs. Lethers went to the shop to fit a little girl and her three year old brother with clogs.

But when William had drained his cup, he turned to the

boy suddenly and with a look of great seriousness. He began by remarking that he hoped Charlie wouldn't mind what he was going to say.

"Y' see, my lad, I'm quite owd enough t' be yer feyther, aren't I now?" he continued, and Charlie, a little alarmed, assented. During the week, he had often wondered how much Mr. and Mrs. Lethers knew about his past—what they might have heard about him from shopkeepers and farmers and gardeners. William knew everybody and everybody knew William, and all Ridingdale seemed to come to his shop. Even the Goodwins apparently, whose farm lay on the other side of Timmington, dealt with Lethers. Perhaps that very day William had learnt something fresh. Charlie began to feel nervously apprehensive. William noticed this and soon set him at his ease.

He said that a new start in this life ought to mean a new start for the Other. It wasn't for him to press the matter, he went on; but didn't Charlie think he'd feel all the better if he just went up to the chapel and had a nice quiet talk with Father Connelly?

The boy blushed painfully. It was not the first time in his young life that William had spoken to him on this subject. Nay, but Charlie now remembered that months ago (last Easter as a matter of fact) he had promised faithfully to go to Confession and—he had not been. He had honestly intended to do so when he made the promise, but somehow the time slipped by and he forgot all about it.

His mother had not been, nor had his sisters, he may have argued, and why should he force himself to go? It was so very long since he had knelt at the feet of God's priest.

There were times when William could speak with rare, if rugged, eloquence, and this was one of them. He guessed some of the lad's difficulties. There was not much in the boy's career that he did not know from hearsay, and from observation he had learned much. Charlie's confession of his temptation the other night had made William hopeful.

"It's such a long time since I went," said the boy when William had finished.

"Just another good reason why yo should goo this very minute."

"It'll take a fearfully long time, Mr. Lethers."

"Wunna do owt o' t' sort. There's only ten commandments, lad."

"I do want to go. I want very badly to go. I've thought about it often lately. Only——"

"Then i' th' name o' God—goo *now!*" exclaimed the man with great earnestness.

And Charlie went.

On leaving the church, the first person Charlie met was Freddy Armstrong. The little boy was going on an errand and could not linger, but one look at Charlie's happy face was enough.

"O Charlie!" exclaimed the child, "you do look so—so glad."

“I feel it, Freddy. Haven’t felt so jolly for years. You see, I’ve just been—well, I’ve just been making up my mind to be a better chap.”

In later years Charlie Chittywick used to say that of all the nights of his life his memory could recall, that particular Saturday night was most crowded with gladness. He had walked slowly up to the chapel with a heart as heavy as lead; he left it, he declared, with something of the joy that a redeemed soul must feel when it finds itself in Paradise. How he got back to the clogger’s shop he never knew, but if he had ridden on the wings of the wind he could scarcely have been fleetier. The shop was full of people, but one glance at the boy’s face as he passed into the parlour was enough for William. “The grace o’ God shone on it,” the man said afterwards.

Charlie had brought back with him two little books. One was a small *Garden of the Soul*, the other a Catechism. He was almost too happy to sit still, but he walked about the room now reading in one book now in the other. Jane and William were as busy as they could be. Charlie would peep now and then through the window into the shop, which looked as though it would never empty, and it seemed to him that everybody he saw was just brimming over with happiness. Once or twice he noticed people who were Catholics, and he felt half-inclined to rush out of the room and shake them heartily by the hand. Young Aloysius O’Brien called for his new boots, and Charley longed

to open the door and ask him if he had made his first Communion. But of course he had, Charlie reflected. Aloysius was fifteen and—the pain came back for a moment—he had a good father and mother. Probably he, Charlie, was the only Catholic boy of his age in the Dale who had never received the Bread of Life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARMSTRONGS.

Freddy Armstrong's feelings in regard to Sunday—in his home it was always spoken of as *the Sabbath*—were curiously mixed. His father was never tired of quoting the text: *This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it*; but to Freddy the rejoicing was not very apparent. It was of course a day of chapel-going and of attendance at Sunday School. Mr. Armstrong himself began it by going to an early prayer-meeting—a before-breakfast service that neither Freddy nor his mother was called upon to attend.

It was a day of much beef. Never once during the whole of his boyhood could Freddy remember an instance of the absence of beef-steak at Sunday breakfast, of roast sirloin at dinner, of cold sirloin at supper. Other heavy forms of food were often added, but the beef was as inevitable as the hour-long sermons. I say hour-long, but when the minister did not exceed the hour the junior members of his congregation congratulated themselves; an hour and a half was not unknown, while an hour and a quarter was considered by many to be their due.

At a quarter-past nine Freddy started off to Sunday School with his father, who was superintendent. The

child's position was an awkward one. He was forbidden to mix with boys who were not of his own rank, and seeing that his father's status in Ridingle was that of a leading man—among the dissenters at least—Freddy often found it difficult to obey the parental injunction. The class of little boys in which he sat was a big and a very mixed one. Fortunately the position was saved by the presence of four or five boys whose parents were either farmers or tradespeople. It is a fact that at this time every single shopkeeper in Ridingle, with the exception of William Lethers and Miss Rippell, was a dissenter.

The teacher of Freddy's class was not even a shopkeeper. He was a young man who did repairs for Rompton the shoemaker. He was a good-living youth, quite without education. Even in a reading lesson Freddy could have beaten him. His intelligence was rather below the average, and he had an odd impediment in his speech which, combined with the broadest possible Yorkshire accent, often enough made him unintelligible to Freddy, if not to the rest. A strong desire to laugh struggled in the boy's mind with a certain pity for the young man; but if it had not been for the perambulating Superintendent with his thick cane, the laughter would have triumphed now and then. Mr. Armstrong was a power in Ridingle, in the Baptist sect, in his own household: in the Sunday School he was a terror. His eye was everywhere: his rod was supple and thick and far-reaching. The biggest lout in the school

quailed before him. Few Sundays passed without a tempest of strokes and a chorus of howls.

Moreover, Mr. Armstrong was wont to come up to Freddy's class at the close of afternoon Sunday School—the dreariest time of the dreary day—and inquire loudly of the teacher: “Well, Tom, has my lad behaved himself?” Fortunately for Freddy, the young cobbler's answer was always re-assuring.

In the warm little heart of the child a sense of gratitude towards this illiterate and uncomely young man would often arise, for Freddy was conscious of many shortcomings—the merest trifles really, but things that his father would have regarded as the gravest delinquencies. Though he was not yet eight years old he was a dreamer of dreams, and his besetting sin was “losing his place” and missing his turn in the Bible that was read verse by verse. The teacher was more patient with him than with some of his companions—perhaps because he was the best reader in the class. But his father had laid it down again and again, in public and in private, that “the Sabbath was a day upon which we were not even to think our own thoughts,” and he, Freddy, thought of a thousand things outside the Scripture lesson.

Sunday was a well-occupied day. The morning was entirely filled with Sunday School and Chapel. The interval between the one o'clock dinner and afternoon Sunday School was a short one. The half-past four o'clock tea generally meant visitors who, to Freddy, were a weariness;

for they talked chapel until he yawned—furtively, because it was a wicked thing to do on the Sabbath, nearly as bad as whistling, but not quite. He was not allowed to speak unless somebody spoke to him, and even the plum-cake and hot toast scarcely compensated for a two hours' sitting upright in a chair from which at that period his legs necessarily dangled. Now and then in sheer pity his mother would send him out into the yard—not to play, of course; that would have been criminal.

But on Sundays even the joys of the farmyard seemed to be absent. Moreover in honor of the day he was clad in solemn black and wore thin shoes, and a walk through the farm meant a careful stepping in clean places and an avoidance of all the haunts and occupations of the week-day. He liked to watch old George milking the cows, but the cowman was a depressing person on Sundays. Almost worse than the parlour visitors was George, for he would catechise Freddy on the morning sermon and ask him searching questions as to the state of his soul, until the little boy was really glad to get back again into the house.

After this, half-past six chapel was almost a relief, and when the sermon came Freddy slept—frankly and tranquilly. His father had indeed objected to this, but mother had pleaded for the slumber on the ground of his extreme youth. It was comfortable in the well-cushioned, thickly-carpeted and hassocked pew, and Freddy sitting by his mother would look at the gaslights until they multiplied themselves—stare at the preacher until he too was multi-

plied and then—well he always woke up at the end to find his head pillowed on his mother's shoulder and his hand resting in hers. There was a prayer-meeting afterwards, but as a rule Freddy and his mother did not remain for it. Father invariably did.

That was quite the nicest time of the day for the child—the little walk home with his arm tucked in mother's—the cosy chat and the quiet hour before father came in from chapel. There would be a big supper at nine o'clock, with cold sirloin and strong ale and Stilton cheese; Freddy himself would be in bed by that time. The minister, and perhaps a deacon or two, would be at supper, but their conversation could not reach the ears of the boy whose hour-long nap in the chapel only increased his appetite for long and profound sleep.

Monday morning brought to Freddy a rush of joy and hope. Once he had donned his every-day suit he felt himself again. A great load was removed with the passing of Sunday. Now he could think his own thoughts without sin. School was school to be sure, but it contained possibilities of fun. It was a ladies' school, but it was attended by boys much older than Freddy. Once he had turned eight he would go to Hardlow—in six months' time, father said; or perhaps less, since he had got on so well since last midsummer. Then all the joys of Hardlow Grammar School would be his.

More than a dozen Ridingdale lads went to Hardlow every day, and among them were the sons not only of the

Baptist but of the Wesleyan minister. It was a famous old school, dating back to the early part of the fourteenth century—though popularly spoken of as a foundation of the reign of Edward VI. Boys of almost every class attended it, the greater number of them being sons of farmers and tradesmen; but among the boarders were always a few lads more or less connected with county families. On the other hand, the poorest boy in Hardlow could claim a free education within its walls once his parents had satisfied certain not very difficult conditions. Its scholarships were eagerly competed for and not unfrequently won by the sons of labourers and factory hands. Its discipline was strict, and, for the sixties, its standard of education was high.

Freddy looked forward to Hardlow School with mixed feelings of course, but with considerable eagerness. It seemed to him that his life would really begin when he found himself within those famous walls. Without showing very much precocity, he was older than his years, and cared very little for the girlish little boys with whom he was now in daily contact. He frequently complained to his mother that they were silly and couldn't talk. She smiled at his stolid little figure and rather serious face—seeing in him always some of the qualities of his father, and perhaps scarcely guessing that in Freddy her husband's sternness of soul was relieved by her own sweet graciousness. Freddy's questions and remarks often startled her; her husband seemed to take them as a matter of course. She was very proud of the child and made a great companion of him.

Mr. Armstrong's business concerns were many and various, and during the week he was often away from home. Though people spoke of him as a farmer and malster, the farming and malting were rather his hobbies than the business of his life. He had trusty and long-tried men to look after both—men who had worked for his own father from whom he had inherited the freehold farm as well as the malt-houses. Mr. Armstrong had started life as a particularly well-to-do man; he had since become a wealthy one.

Without actually fearing or disliking his father, Freddy always felt relieved when he heard that "the master" had gone to Leeds for the week. With his mother the boy never felt lonely and could talk quite freely and happily. Since in his father's absence she had not forbidden it, he would sometimes talk to her about Charlie Chittywick; in his father's presence he did not dare to mention the name, though Mr. Armstrong had never forbidden his son to speak to, or of, Charlie. The malster had simply no idea that the two boys were known to one another. If anyone had informed him of the fact he would instantly have denied it.

Nor had Mrs. Armstrong forbidden her son to speak to Charlie. Freddy had so many times during the past year or two talked of a big boy of that name who had been "so *very* kind to him" that, even when she discovered that this big boy was the son of the man who had cheated her husband, she had no feelings towards Charlie that were

not kindly and grateful; and when one day as she and Freddy were walking up the High Street together they met Charlie face to face, her heart went out in pity for the shabby, hungry-looking lad. With only a shame-faced glance at Mrs. Armstrong, Charlie had raised his cap and passed on, not daring to stop and speak to Freddy. But to ask Charlie to her house, or even to the farmyard, was quite another matter, and much as her son begged for it she dared not run the risk of exciting her husband's wrath.

"Do you know, muver—have you heard?"—Freddy began one Monday morning in January as he and his mother sat at breakfast—"Charlie Chittywick has gone to work. He's gone to the factory at Hardlow."

Mrs. Armstrong expressed surprise and pleasure, but Freddy was silent for some seconds. He scarcely knew what to think of this great change in his hero's life.

"Everybody's glad," went on Freddy after a time. "I think I'm sorry, but I don't know." He had rather hoped that his mother would express some regret; still, he was wont to take his cue from her on most subjects, if not all—what little boy does not take his cue from mother?—and he wanted to hear her view of the matter. She quoted the lines of Dr. Watts's hymn—the lines about Satan and the mischief that he finds "for idle hands to do."

"I s'pose," asked Freddy a little doubtfully, "he's *really* a big boy and—very strong?" When you are eight years old, any lad who is more than head and shoulders taller than yourself is looked up to as a big fellow.

“Strong enough to work, dear. It will do him good. Anything is better than idling about the streets. And much younger boys than Charlie work at the factory.”

At this period there was no Education Act. Little boys had no School Board Inspector to evade: but they paid a big penalty for their freedom. Not only did they forfeit some of life's greatest pleasures and advantages, but their existence became one of perpetual hard labour long before their bodies were fitted for such servitude.

“Another egg, Freddy?”

“No, thank you, muver.”

Freddy was abstracted. Five or six separate questions were struggling in his mind for precedence, yet it was imperative that he should wrestle with eggs and bacon and marmalade, and the time was limited. Mr. Armstrong had long ago driven to Hardlow in order to catch an early train for Leeds: the railway had not yet reached Ridingdale—conceited little town as it was. It was more than half-past eight and school began at nine. A certain lesson wanted looking over again and, calamity of calamities! he had not yet put his boots on. Mother had said that he was always to put them on and lace them before breakfast, as it was not good to stoop immediately after a meal; but this morning he had forgotten. In fact Freddy was greatly pre-occupied—with two kinds of food. His food for thought was almost as abundant as the ample meal he was steadily finishing.

Rising from the table to ring for more hot water, Mrs.

Armstrong stumbled over Freddy's boots which were standing in a conspicuous place on the hearth-rug. Chiding him for not having put them on, she stopped to remove them and in doing so took a glance at their hob-nailed soles. She had the careful mother's horror of wet feet, and outside the half-melted snow lay in slushy heaps. She was not a little surprised to find that from these strong little boots, *new* just before Christmas, her son had lost nearly half their proper equipment of nails.

"Before you come home to dinner, Freddy," she commanded, "be sure you call at Tom's shop and have those nails put in. However have you managed to cast so many?"

Freddy blushed and murmured something about "just playing about;" but he was not at all sure that the play had always been of a legitimate kind. At this time of the year a boy could not be expected to walk to school when nature had made it possible for him to slide nearly all the way. This might be allowed to pass; but what of that new and exciting game to which the minister's youngest son had lately introduced him! It consisted of striking sparks from the flag-stones—or better still, some hard little stretch of asphalted pavement—with your nailed boots; and that such sport meant an inevitable shedding of nails Freddy was prepared to admit. Here was another worry for a boy possessing something that resembled a conscience.

It was well that Freddy was sturdy and sleek. A half-starved little boy oppressed with the weight of all the un-

solved problems that lay upon the soul of Master Armstrong, would have been a pitiable object. By the healthy and abundantly-fed such things can be borne patiently.

This morning, home looked very cosy and inviting, and Freddy thought it a little hard that Arthur Joyce and two other small school-companions should, in the way of bad colds, be privileged above their fellows. The dining-room fire glowed strongly upon the thick Turkey carpet, the warm-looking crimson curtains and the dark red paper on the walls. The portrait of Mr. Spurgeon that hung opposite the big mirror over the mantel-piece, seemed actually to laugh. Breakfast was becoming a past event, but it had been exceedingly nice and quite unstinted. Indeed if the truth must be told, Freddy breathed rather hard and got redder than usual in the face when he stooped to lace his boots.

It was a warm and rosy little boy, top-coated and muffled and kissed by a solicitous mother, that faced the damp grey January morning, envying that same mother just a little for that she could remain all the day, if so inclined, within the glow of the fire and under the shadow of Mr. Spurgeon's portrait.

CHAPTER VIII.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Sitting in his stockinged feet in Tom's shop, and watching the young man drive one nail after another into the small heavy boot, Freddy began to put to the cobbler a case of conscience.

"I want to ask you something, Tom," Freddy began. "I want you to tell me if you think this is a story. Muvver looked at my boots this morning, and she asked me how I came to lose so many nails. (You see, Tom, these boots were new about a month ago.) Well, I said, 'O, I don't know, muvver: I suppose in playing.' But then I *did* know how some of them went, and it wasn't exactly playing—though perhaps it was something like it. Two or three of us stopped after school on that hard bit of gas-tar road, trying to knock sparks out of it with our boots. And I know that I lost a lot of nails out of mine because I noticed it the next morning. Well, Tom, do you think I told muver a lie?"

In the very act of raising his hammer Tom had paused to stare at Freddy. The cobbler's face was a study. He dropped his hammer and remained silent and thoughtful. Suddenly he had been confronted with what to him was a phenomenon—a boy with a conscience. Moreover, it was

the first time in his life that he had ever been asked to solve a problem in moral theology.

For several minutes the Sunday School teacher within him struggled with the shoe-mender. There were ever so many reasons why he could not discourage the shedding of hob-nails on the part of school-boys. No job that came to him was quite so easy or so lucrative as the "hobbing" of boys' boots. No fetching or carrying or waiting for the money. A lad came into the shop, sat down, took off a boot and handed it in. Twenty, thirty or fifty clinkers were driven home in no time, and all Tom had to do was to count them up at the end—he charged so much a dozen—and pocket the pennies. He worked for Rompton who kept the boot-shop in the High Street, but these little informal jobs were his own perquisites and he valued them highly.

But then Tom was a Sunday School teacher and a "church-member." And here was a little boy with a slightly troubled conscience—in Tom's narrow experience a rare bird indeed. Sin or no sin, was the question. Either the child had told a lie, or he had not. If he had (according to Tom's theology, which was that of his sect), he was a slave of the devil and hell was yawning to receive his soul—unless Freddy happened to be a child of election. That Mrs. Armstrong was saved he had no sort of doubt; concerning the malster he was not so sure. It was quite true that Freddy's father was a trustee of the chapel and that he had delivered it from debt; it could not be denied that Mr. Armstrong was the oldest deacon and that he had

for years been Superintendent of the Sunday School, *but*—he was not a teetotaller. Tom was.

Tom looked at the well-dressed boy sitting in front of him, and then at the strong little boot on his knee and delivered himself.

“It dunna sound altogether reet, awm thinkin’. An’ a lie’s an awful thing.”—He quoted many Scripture texts here, dwelling with relish on “fire unquenchable.”—“I’d go to t’ throne o’ grace if I was yo, Freddy. An’ I wouldna slape till I’d put it reet wi’ t’ mother.”

Freddy’s hands trembled a little as he began to lace the one finished boot. He had little enough to fear from his mother—except her tears. She was a gentle but a strict woman, more refined than her husband and better educated. People often told Freddy that he was “a child of many tears.”

Tom was determined to be on the safe side, and with him the safe side was ever the rigorous one. So it was a serious-looking little boy that clattered up the High Street—a little unsteadily because of the many new nails that were at present above the level of the old ones—not daring to try spark-making upon the asphalt pavement, or upon the flags that succeeded it; not even stopping at the toy-shop window on this occasion, an omission that meant great pre-occupation of mind with Freddy. In Tom’s judgment he had told mother a lie. He had not meant to do so, of course. He wondered if that fact could make any difference to the sin.

He had received an answer to one, and only one, of the several questions that were upon his mind; for after Tom's decision in this very personal case, Freddy had not liked to speak of the souls of others. As he trotted towards home he felt, quite literally *felt*, that he had a good excuse for calling again upon the cobbler at the end of afternoon school. Either Tom had driven one nail too far into the boot, or the nail itself was a little longer than its fellows. Anyhow it hurt, and it would have to be hammered down from the inside.

At their *tête-à-tête* dinner Freddy had intended to talk to his mother about Charlie Chittywick and to put to her the several questions that were puzzling him; now he would have to make confession of his sin. This he intended to do over the pudding. He could not risk an earlier spoiling of his mother's appetite—to say nothing of his own. It was fortunate perhaps that in the end he did not defer his self-accusation. As he entered the dining-room he limped ever so little, but his mother noticed it.

"It's a nail, muver," he said in answer to her inquiry. "P'raps it's a judgment," he went on after some hesitation. The rest of the confession became easy. Rather to his surprise mother did not look very shocked. In fact, long before the pudding came on, she fell to praising him; by the time he had finished his second helping he felt that he had deserved both pudding and praise. She quite refused to believe that the nail was a judgment. She did not even forbid him to strike sparks on the asphalt. She only in-

sisted upon a change of boots, bidding him call upon Tom with the hurting article immediately after school.

“You’ve heard about Charlie Chittywick, haven’t you, Tom?” was Freddy’s first question when he had handed in the offending boot. “You’ve heard he’s gone to work at Hardlow?”

Tom admitted the fact—rather grudgingly Freddy thought.

“It’s t’ first time I iver ’eerd ought good o’ yon,” added the cobbler, in a tone which implied that it would also be the last.

Freddy thought this rather a bad opening, but the opportunity of asking his Sunday School teacher a few questions was too precious to be lost.

“Muver thinks it’ll be very good for him,” hazarded Freddy.

“Good for his belly ’appen,” muttered Tom. “But figs dunna grow on thistles.”

Freddy pondered this remark for a moment and then said:

“But, Tom, he’s going to be a better boy. He told me so.”

Tom hammered at the boot before him with more vigour than was necessary. Then he fixed Freddy with a stern eye.

“Let me tell thee a thing, Freddy Armstrong: if there’s one lad i’ this ’ere Dale what’s a’ready damned—it’s Charlie Chittywick.”

Freddy gasped at the fearful emphasis with which this was said.

“ Si thee, now. He’s a liar, *and* a thief. What says t’ book about liars and thieves? ”

Another fierce assault upon the boot; and the man paused again to exclaim:

“ Damned and double-damned is that Chittywick lad! Isn’t he a *Papist*? ”

Freddy could only trust himself to nod.

“ And what’s a Papist? ” the cobbler demanded fiercely.

It was a question that Freddy could have answered in his own way, but he knew that it had been put rhetorically and that Tom would answer it himself. He did so and at great length. This ignorant cobbler merely repeated in uncouth language what educated men of his own sect had spoken and written. The gist of it was that every Catholic is born into the world damned for all eternity. The Vicar of Rid-
ingdale had said the same thing, both in public and in private.

“ But, Tom,” faltered the little boy, “ can’t Charlie—*can’t* he be converted? ”

Tom shook his head solemnly.

“ How can a lad be saved what mocks at the Gospel? ”

Freddy’s eyes were inquiring ones and Tom told the story. Stripped of its dialect and verbosity it amounted to this:—Tom had found the lad “ shacking about,” as he put it, and had offered him a tract. Charlie had refused to accept it, saying with a laugh, “ No thanks, Tom, I write

'em myself." It was only an old joke that the boy had seen in some comic paper, but it exasperated the cobbler. There and then he had told Charlie what his proximate and remote future would assuredly be and—for it happened to be one of those days when the boy was maddened with hunger—Charlie had retorted by bidding his tormentor to go to the place of which he was speaking,

The affair had rankled in Tom's mind, and certainly in his estimation Charlie was doubly and trebly condemned.

Freddy could not argue with his Sunday School teacher. The fact that Charlie was a Papist was a hard one—one that could only be admitted sorrowfully; but in the mind of the little chap there was a strong feeling that, whatever Tom might say, Charlie was going to be a better boy. Had not even the very look of him changed? There was no frown now on the pale face: the nervous, frightened, hungry glance had vanished. More than ever, Charlie was a sort of hero to Freddy, and to the latter the thought that a Catholic was doomed by the very fact to fire unquenchable was excruciatingly painful. For the first time in his life he felt disposed to question his teacher's authority.

Absolute loyalty is one of the rarest things on earth, because it requires a rare degree of unselfishness. But just as the good God sends us a really bright and sunny nature now and then in order to make the world more habitable, so the same kind Providence creates for our solace here below a few hearts that are entirely loyal and true. They

belong to men and women who do the best and most lasting work for souls.

To be loyal to Charlie had long been part of Freddy's religion. He could not forget the trifling services Charlie had done for him; he could not forget the sufferings of the boy who had always been kind to him. Yet the two had nothing in common—saving human nature. Freddy had begun by pitying the hungry pale-faced boy, and then a big gratitude for little favours had intervened. Pity and gratitude lead to love of the truest kind, and in Freddy's prayers at his bedside Charlie's name came immediately after that of father and mother.

Extra thoughtful was the little face—in repose it always looked serious—as its owner stumped steadily up the High Street towards home and tea. So much, so very much, Freddy wanted to ask somebody, anybody, if it were true that all Catholics would go to hell. Charlie's name could not be mentioned before his father. To whom could he go with a question of this sort? He had great respect for Mr. Colpington the chemist, who was said by everybody to be a “long-headed man”—whatever that might mean; but Freddy scarcely liked to march in to the druggist's shop without being sent. He liked Miss Rippell very much, but then she belonged to the Church of England; and besides, his father said she was worldly. Kolverston the confectioner was not only a Baptist, but an occasional local preacher, and fully approved of as a God-fearing man by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong. Freddy paused for a moment

as he came to Kolverston's window—he very frequently did—and just at that very moment who should come out of the shop but the new minister!

Mr. Wanefort was still called the *new* minister, though as a matter of fact he had been in Ridinglee nearly six months. Whether he would find himself there six months hence had already become a favourite subject of conversation at Ridinglee tea-tables. It was a question that only Freddy's father could answer, but no one dared put it to him. There were people who watched his face carefully during Mr. Wanefort's sermons and who from time to time nodded to one another significantly. The poor minister had his admirers, but they were not among the richer members of his flock. Freddy was beginning to love him.

"Hello! hello! Freddy!" cried the minister, "where are you off to?"

He was a cheerful, breezy little man, with a keen face whose rather hard lines were softened by an honest smile.

"Coming home from school, eh? That's right, just the jolliest time of the day. Tea and cakes waiting at home—possibly jam—eh?"

The minister laughed pleasantly as he glanced down upon the child who looked so solemn.

"Please, sir——" began Freddy and then stopped.

"What is it, my little man?"

Freddy looked up at the minister and felt encouraged.

"Please, Mr. Wanefort, I want to ask you something. May I?"

“Course you may. Fire ahead, Freddy!”

“Does—I mean do—all Roman Catholics go to hell?”

It was a cold night and the minister badly wanted to get home, but he pulled himself up short and stood still looking down upon Freddy with amazement.

“What a fearful question, my boy,” he said at length, trying to master his astonishment. “Whatever put such a notion into a little head like yours? I wish all Baptists were as sure of going to heaven as some Catholics I know—ay, some even in this town.”

It was Freddy now who looked astonished—and something more.

“Have you any idea, child, how many million Catholics there are in the world? But of course you haven’t. And if I told you, it wouldn’t help things very much. But you’ve looked at the map of Europe, haven’t you? And you remember what a tiny little country England is, eh? Well, don’t forget that by far the greater part of Europe is Catholic, not Protestant. And remember that Europe is not the whole of the big world. Well now, just try to think what it would mean if all Catholics were lost. However, we’ll talk about that some other time. It is not exactly what I wanted to say. Only you are a little boy—old for your years, Freddy, but still a little boy, and it is good for you to know that Ridingle is a very little town and that England is a very little country.”

It was not at all what the minister had meant to say. But he had just been having an argument with Kolverston,

who was one of his deacons, and had vainly tried to make the man understand that Ridingle was not the world's metropolis. The egregious narrow-mindedness of his flock often left him hopeless.

Freddy had hardly listened to the minister's words—once it was made clear to him that there was a chance of salvation, even for a Papist. The child's heart was suddenly filled with hope, and a second question was struggling within him for expression. Mr. Wanefort was beginning to speak again when Freddy's timid "Please, sir," interrupted him. Like all really good men the minister loved to be questioned by a child.

"Supposing," began Freddy—and he repeated the word several times—"supposing there was a boy who was downright wicked, and told lies, and stole things, and laughed at people who tried to do him good. And then suppose that he began to work—hard, and gave over telling lies and stealing and—and tried to be good, and——" Freddy was out of breath and did not quite know how to finish the sentence.

"Well, my boy?" asked the minister, "what then?"

"I mean—*could* he be good if he wanted, and perhaps—perhaps go to heaven when he died?"

"*Perhaps*, my child, why do you say 'perhaps.' There can be no *perhaps* in a case of that sort? For whom did Christ die, Freddy?"

"For the elect," came the reply—though what the word really meant Freddy had no notion.

They were nearing Mr. Armstrong's house and the minister could not prolong the conversation; but Freddy never forgot the last words with which they parted.

“ My dear little lad, as you hope to be saved yourself, repeat these words of Jesus Christ until they are, as it were, burnt into your soul:—‘ *I am not come to call the just, but sinners to repentance.*’ ”

CHAPTER IX.

THREE MONTHS LATER.

There may be, there often is, an amazing difference between one small town and another, though the distance that separates them be very small. For years Hardlow had had a bad name in Ridingle, and indeed throughout the district. Some said that the presence of a large factory made all the difference: many declared that the prevailing rowdiness was due to quite other causes. The common feeling of the Dale was that, for the most part, the inhabitants of Hardlow were "a low lot."

It is to Charlie's credit that he passed three months at the factory without coming into collision with any of his mates, and without forming any undesirable acquaintances. In a fatherly way William had warned him against bad influences of this kind.

"Dunna be in a 'urry to tek oop wi' a mate o' any sort," the clogger had said. "They canna all be bad; but tek a good look round before yo chip in wi' anybody."

Happily Charlie did not at present feel the need of "chipping in" with any of his fellow-workers. "Knocking off" time found him weary, and the dark winter-times did not tempt him out. Once he had taken off his clogs

he was not inclined to put them on again until the following morning.

Grannie made him very comfortable. Small and unpretentious as the cottage was, it was more homely and cosy, and much better-cared for, than his mother's house. And except at the Lethers' he had never enjoyed such ample meals. A sense of great satisfaction and thankfulness possessed him as he sat leisurely getting a hot and substantial tea. He had done the work of the day, had laboured honestly and well. Night was the time for rest. He had no anxieties, no forebodings. The old life with its shameful shifts and meagre meals was over.

Books took on a new meaning for him. Though William Lethers could not read, his house was not a bookless one. His wife and sons were scholars—in the Dale sense of the term. And Charlie never left Ridingle on a Sunday night without carrying back a book. With him it became the book of the week.

In her choice of reading, and as it was a matter of laying out "good money," Mrs. Lethers took advice. The hanging book-case in the parlour behind the shop contained a library that was representatively Catholic. There was Church history, there were lives of the saints. There were some of the novels of Scott and Dickens, and bound volumes of old Catholic magazines. Charlie began with the last-mentioned.

Nightly he fell asleep over his book, but not until he had had an hour or two's steady reading. Now and then he

would read aloud to grannie who sat sewing or knitting by the fire. But half-past eight or nine o'clock found him ready for bed, and he slept the sleep of the healthy working lad.

O but the early mornings were chilly and a little cheerless! By six o'clock to the minute he must pass through the factory gates. Thanks to his grannie's care and William Lethers' generosity, he had been able to add to his clothing. A suit of fustian, thick and warm, covered his thin limbs. Cold feet could hardly be his when lambswool and a good inch of wood and iron came between them and the snow or mud.

Saturday afternoon found him "true to the kindred points" of Ridingle and church. The week-end became a happy time. Even the walk was enjoyable. He always paid a visit to his mother—making it quite clear that he was ready to stay just as long as she wished for his company. Sometimes he thought it hard that he should be made so welcome by the Lethers and that his own mother should not even ask him to take a cup of tea.

The hour's instruction he now received weekly from Father Macdonald introduced the lad into a new world of thought and feeling. Sunday's sermon supplemented it very notably. The plain unadorned pulpit-talk went straight home to his heart. For the first time he fully realized the great truths of the religion in which he had been baptized, but of whose very first principles he had been brought up in ignorance. Happily for him, in the society

of William Lethers and his family Charlie could see that religion in action, as well as in theory. Boy as he was, he could appreciate the practical piety of his host and hostess. In urging, or rather coaxing, him to this or that Catholic usage, they asked for nothing that they did not themselves rigorously observe.

Easter was to bring him the Joy of Joys. On Easter Sunday he was to make his First Communion. Pleased with his attention and intelligence, the priest would have admitted him to this great privilege long before Paschal-time had not the boy himself shown some anxiety to make one or two confessions before presenting himself at the altar. Helped by the grace of these confessions Charlie was gradually developing a certain delicacy of conscience not uncommon, though by no means too frequently met with, in boys of his age.

Nearly two months had he labored at the mechanical drudgery of the mill without receiving anything very remarkable in the shape either of praise or blame. The work he was employed in gave him no opportunity of distinguishing himself. His only virtues had been punctuality, attention, and a certain respectful attitude to those above him. He had only once or twice caught sight of the Manager since the morning of his arrival at Hardlow, and that important person had apparently taken no notice of the pale-faced boy whose clothes did not seem to make him like the rest of the young factory-lads.

One morning towards the end of March, Charlie was

summoned to the office. Such a sudden and unexpected occurrence frightened him a little, for he was a boy with a past. Putting on his fustian coat and trying to smooth his somewhat unruly hair, he prayed that his past sins might not find him out. As to the present, his conscience was clear enough, but—supposing the question was put to him, could he deny that he had been a thief?

Something in the Manager's manner re-assured him, and the boy took heart after glancing at the great man's face. He was often a quick-spoken, worried-looking manager, this Mr. Paleworthy; to-day he seemed almost gentle and a quiet smile rested upon his lips. After one hasty glance at his master, Charlie fixed his eyes on the brass toe-caps of his clogs and waited. For a moment or two the Manager scrutinized him in silence.

"Do you find your work hard?" asked Mr. Paleworthy at length.

"Not very, sir," the boy answered, raising his head. "Just a little sometimes, sir, but not *very* hard."

"Do you write a good hand?"

Charlie's blush was a deep one as he said, "I'm afraid not, sir."

"Let me see it, will you," said Mr. Paleworthy moving a heap of papers from his blotting-pad and selecting a short letter and a sheet of paper. "Just copy that. Don't hurry over it. I shall be back in a few minutes."

Very considerably the Manager left the office. Charlie wished his hand would not shake so. What if he should

make a blot! So much might depend upon the fair copying of this letter. He wished the paper had been ruled. Surely that line was anything but straight! How glad he was that the letter was so short!

He had finished it long before the Manager re-appeared. What a nice office it was, the boy thought, and what a thick carpet! He hoped the grooved irons of his clogs were not marking it. He wished his hands were a little cleaner, but he had not dared to stop to wash them, and he hoped Mr. Paleworthy would understand that.

"Finished? Ah! Hum!" said the Manager as he stepped to the desk and took the copy into his hands. "Room for improvement, certainly. But then you are young, aren't you? Not much over fourteen, are you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, all you want is careful practice. You would soon improve upon this. Besides, your hand is a little unsteady with work of a different kind. Don't you feel yourself that with practice you could do better than this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course. Well, now—sit down for a minute. Can you ride?"

Charlie looked up quickly, and there was an unhesitating ring about his "Yes, sir." He had done a good deal of riding in his time—chiefly of the bare-backed sort.

"That's all right. More boys can *write* than *ride* in these days, I find. What I want just now is a sort of messenger-boy—a lad who can be ready at any moment to

saddle a pony and take letters or messages, sometimes small parcels, all about the neighbourhood. I suppose you know the Dale pretty well?"

Again Charlie could answer without hesitation. Within a radius of twenty miles, few lads knew the country so well.

"I have been employing a very good and trustworthy young fellow up to now," the Manager went on; "but he is growing up and I am going to take him into the office. I have been making inquiries about you in the mill and I find that you have given satisfaction. Moreover, I fancy you are more intelligent than some of our Hardlow lads, and your manners are certainly superior. Of course I shall have to make further inquiries about you. You came here from Riddingdale, did you not?"

Charlie's face grew whiter than it was wont to be as he answered "Yes, sir." Fortunately the Manager had turned to his desk and was making some memoranda on a slip of paper.

"You will have to carry about rather large sums of money sometimes to pay bills, get change, and so forth. So you see the post is one of trust, and in the interests of the firm I am bound to be as careful as possible in the choice of a messenger. I dare say you are very well known in Riddingdale?"

Poor Charlie! Than he, nobody was better known in that little country town.

"Perhaps you yourself can suggest some reference."

The boy felt quite sick with fear. He doubted if any

man or woman in the Dale, saving Mr. and Mrs. Lethers, would give him a good word.

"Perhaps your clergyman could speak for you," the Manager suggested, seeing that Charlie hesitated.—He was a good man, this Mr. Paleworthy. He did not add to the boy's embarrassment by fixing his eyes upon him. But before the lad could reply he asked:

"I suppose you are a member of the Church of England?"

"No, sir. I'm a Catholic."

Mr. Paleworthy started a little. Perhaps the only very solid prejudice that possessed him was that of Protestantism.

"I'm sorry to hear *that*." The Manager's manner had stiffened considerably. "However——" Mr. Paleworthy paused. For a minute or two nothing was heard but the ticking of the office clock. Charlie wished his heart would not thump so badly: he was half afraid the Manager would hear it.

"Were you educated at Ridingdale?" the man asked at length.

In rather faltering words Charlie explained that his father had once kept a school, and that on its breaking up he (Charlie) had gone on doing lessons at home.

"Is your father a Romanist?"

"No, sir. Only my mother."

"I see. Well, of course, you are not to blame. But I must have a good reference from some responsible person. In fact, I should like *two*. And I should certainly prefer

them to come from Protestants. Indeed I am not sure that I ought not to require some one to act as surety for your honesty. It is a thing often asked for in connection with places of trust. Well, I need not detain you any longer now. You may if you like take a holiday this afternoon and go over to Ridingdale. If you can get testimonials from two Protestants of any standing or position I will—well, I will consider the matter further. Or if any one person will go surety for you to the extent of—say twenty pounds, I will dispense with the references. I will see you again to-morrow.”

CHAPTER X.

A DILEMMA.

Never before had Charlie's hopes been raised so suddenly and so high—only to fall so suddenly and so low.

As the lad walked slowly and dispiritedly to Ridingdale that afternoon, he told himself again and again that he was going upon a perfectly useless errand. This honourable and desirable post was not for him. On the whole however it seemed better to talk the matter over with the only friends he possessed. At the very least he would get their sympathy. He wanted that rather rare commodity very badly.

It all seemed so very hard and so impossible to bear. Just at the very time when he was trying his hardest to be good, and to do his duty both to God and to his neighbour, his past sin was finding him out. He could not feel really secure of his old place in the factory, quite apart from the coveted post of messenger. Mr. Paleworthy had spoken of making inquiries in Ridingdale, and Charlie did not doubt that he would do so even if the two references were forthcoming. Charlie passed in review all the gentry, farmers, and tradespeople in the town: there was not one to whom he could go and demand a testimonial. Even William Lethers could not say truthfully that Charles Chittywick had always

been an honest boy; for though Charlie had never stolen so much as an apple from the clogger's garden, William was sure to have heard of his many peccadilloes. And of all men Charlie had ever known intimately, William was the least likely to tell a downright lie.

A rush of tears came to his eyes more than once as he realized the hopelessness of his case. Why had Mr. Paleworthy sent for him at all? Why couldn't he have left him alone to work as a common factory-lad? Why should his hopes have been raised to the seventh heaven, only to be lowered to the depths of despair? The whole business seemed so cruelly and unnecessarily sad. By a big effort that had cost him much he had tried to break with the past and all its naughtiness, and lo! it was all returning upon him with a force that threatened to overwhelm him.

Taking the short cut over the fields that led to Ridingdale from Timington, he sat down for a while upon a gate. A sudden thought struck him. He was making a useless journey—why should he pursue it? The factory at Hardlow was not the only one in Yorkshire. Why remain there to have his past deeds raked up, the sins he had truly repented of and confessed and determined never to commit again brought to the light of day and commented upon by that merciless Manager? It was a free country and he was a free lad. He blushed hotly at the thought that but for the forbearance of others he might not have been free for several years to come.

Surely the best and wisest thing he could do would be

to get clear away from the Dale and from the past! The misery would always be hanging over him. It would be a satisfaction to his mother if he took his clogs and his fustian to some remote neighbourhood. He did not like the thought of leaving grannie, and to bid good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Lethers would be a big trial. In the long run, however, it would be better. He would go where there was a Catholic church, of course.

Should he start at once, or wait until pay-day? It was Thursday, and he had only a few coppers left. Wherever he went he would have to walk, but that did not frighten him. Would it be right to go without saying anything to the Manager? Ought he to start without a word to William and his wife?

“Why that’s niver *Charlie*, is’t?”

The voice was behind him, but before Charlie could get off the gate William Lethers had reached it.

“Why, whatever ista doin’ ’ere lad, this time o’ day?”

William leant against the gate. He had been collecting debts in the neighborhood of Timington and was on his way home.

Charlie could not tell his tale with a straight lip, and William’s heart filled with pity as he listened with the sympathy of silence. Late March sunshine flooded the meadows. A lark sang overhead. Little lambs skipped and played in a neighbouring field.

Even when the lad had told his story in great detail, William was silent. He was “bethinkin’” himself, as he

would have said; but Charlie took his friend's speechlessness as a confirmation of his own despair.

"I shall go away altogether, Mr. Lethers," said the boy wearily. "I shall get out of the Dale as soon as ever I can. There might be a chance for me elsewhere: there's none here. I was thinking about it when you came up."

"Let's be gettin' on a bit, lad," said William at length laying a kindly hand upon the boy's shoulder. "It's about ar'past three, I reckon," looking at his watch. "We shall be in good time for tea."

For an instant Charlie made as though he would refuse, but William's hand was upon him and he felt that he could not break away rudely from so good a friend.

"We mun talk this o'er wi' Jane, that we mun. My missis 'as got a wunderful 'ead for business, lad. She can 'most see through a stone wall at times."

One thing Charlie was fully resolved not to mention. Boy-like he had quite misunderstood Mr. Paleworthy's remark about a guarantee or surety, thinking it meant a present payment of twenty pounds down, a kind of apprenticeship fee. This he determined under no circumstances to mention either to William or his wife.

William again relapsed into a brown study, and Charlie walked by his side in melancholy silence.

Mrs. Lethers was anything but silent—once the two were seated at her tea-table. Her mind and William's worked in totally different ways. Jane thought aloud and in many words. Happily she did much more. She was

prompt in kindly action as well as voluble in speech: in this she showed herself superior to many of her sex.

Nothing of course could be done until tea was over. That helpful, necessary meal did not check the discussion of Charlie's case; unfortunately, the more the matter was debated the more hopeless it seemed to be, and the more humiliating. For as Mrs. Lethers mentioned one tradesman after another to whom she was quite prepared to appeal for the lad's references, Charlie was forced to explain why an interview with the person mentioned would be useless. And with every fresh confession he had the miserable feeling that even in the estimation of these two people who had been so good to him he was lowering himself irreparably.

Mr. and Mrs. Lethers had known much of his past, but even they were not quite prepared to hear of the extent of his delinquencies. William looked at the lad in amazement—with reproach Charlie thought—as one sad fact after another was revealed.

“No, Mrs. Lethers, you are very kind, but it's no good. It's all up with me. I'll go back and tell Mr. Paleworthy that I can't get the references. Perhaps he'll let me go on working in the factory. If he doesn't I'll go into Lancashire. I'll go to Oldburn. Now the cotton famine's quite over they're getting very busy everywhere, and I'll soon get a job.”

Mrs. Lethers had played her highest card by saying that she would put on her bonnet and go to see Colonel

Ruggerson or his wife. With a melancholy shake of the head Charlie had, so to say, trumped that card. Though he had never taken anything belonging to the Colonel he had reason to fear the leading Catholic in Ridingdale—its richest man and certainly one of its sternest. For the Colonel had spoken to Charlie more than once during the past year, and in terms that had made the boy wince.

“If you’re brought before me, young man, you’ll get no mercy,” the military magistrate had said. “The fact that you’re a Catholic makes it all the worse. I should have to make an example of *you*.”

After this both William and his wife were very silent for a time. It is scarcely necessary to say that after a while Mrs. Lethers found her tongue.

There must be some way out of the difficulty, she urged. She, or William, or both of them would see Mr. Paleworthy. He couldn’t be so bigoted as to reject their references just because they were Catholics. William wasn’t a rich man, but he was a tradesman—ay, just as respectable as any man in Ridingdale that stood behind a counter. He had been born and bred there, and his father and grandfather had been cloggers before him—honest men that paid their way and always had a bit laid by in the bank.

“But, Mrs. Lethers,” said the hopeless boy, “if you saw Mr. Paleworthy he’d be sure to ask you a lot of questions about me, and I know—I know—”

“We shouldna tell lies, you mean? That’s reet enough,”

Jane admitted. "But you know, my lad, there's different sorts o' ways o' sayin' what's true."

Charlie saw that quite well. Even if these good people had to admit his past dishonesty, they would not do it without explaining its circumstances and the strength of his temptation.

"Now, luke a 'ere!" exclaimed William with a force and suddenness that startled Charlie, "luke a 'ere, lad! I've got a thowt. Did this Mester Paleworthy say owt about money—I mean owt about getting a surety?"

Charlie blushed and played with his tea-cup.

"Nay, lad, out wi't. Dunna kape nowt back."

"I didn't want to tell you that. He did say something about money—twenty pounds. He said *either* that or two references."

"Ah!" exclaimed William, looking at his wife. "Ow's that, lass?"

"It's a deal of money," Mrs. Lethers replied, looking fixedly at her husband.

"It's a deal o' money," William admitted. "You'n got to sell a sight o' clogs before you'n made twenty pound profit."

"O but you mustn't think of it," Charlie said quickly. "I wouldn't have thought of mentioning it if you hadn't asked me. I made up my mind not to. I won't have you pay all that money for me."

"Pey!" exclaimed William. "Yo dunna mean to say as you'd run away and *mek* us pey it?"

"Oh, I see," said Charlie, as the truth dawned upon him, and with it just a tiny ray of hope. "I understand now. Yes, of course, Mr. Paleworthy spoke of a *surety*. That doesn't mean paying the money down, does it? It only means that if I—"

"William!" exclaimed Mrs. Lethers rising, "if you've done your tea I want you in t' shop."

The boy knew quite well that they could not discuss the matter in his presence. He felt somewhat nervous as to their decision. He saw clearly that the only possible chance of his getting the appointment lay in the willingness of these good people to make themselves responsible for his honesty. Surely it was asking a great deal of them? His reformation was such a very recent affair—a matter of not quite three months. Kolverston the confectioner had once told him that he had "bad blood in him." The man had done his best with the aid of a stinging cane to remove a little of that same bad blood; but, thought Charlie, there must be a good deal of it still left within his system. He came from a bad stock, other candid and exasperated people had told him; could he deny it? He paced the little back room with a shamed and anxious face, feeling himself a nuisance to everybody and beginning to regret that William had chanced to overtake him on that particular afternoon. Far the best thing he could do, he told himself, would be to get out of the Dale, out of the county, altogether. He had already made himself to all intents and purposes a Lancashire lad: why should he remain in Yorkshire?

"So that's settled!" William called out as he opened the door and returned to the parlour followed by his wife. The settlement had not taken long.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lethers, "me and William's talked it o'er. Y'see," she continued, looking at Charlie keenly and speaking significantly, "we've got good 'opes of a lad what begins to go to his duties and sticks to 'em."

"Yes," echoed William, "and *sticks to 'em*."

"So we've a mind to trust thee, lad, and we dunna think we'll iver be disappointed."

What Charlie said is difficult to record, because it could only utter itself in broken syllables; but both William and his wife seemed to understand.

An hour later, a rather breathless lad found himself standing at Mr. Paleworthy's desk. The Manager was looking at a card that Charlie had just handed to him in an envelope: it was the business card of William Lethers, Bootmaker and Clogger, High St., Riddingdale.

"So this gentleman is prepared to stand surety for you, is he?" asked Mr. Paleworthy.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Lethers has written the name of her bank on the back of the card, sir."

"Hum! Well, that is all right," said the Manager as he read *York and County Banking Co.* "I fancy I've heard of Lethers. He has been in Riddingdale for a long time, has he not?"

"All his life, sir."

“Oh, that’s all right. Very well. I’ll have the paper drawn up to-morrow morning. And if it’s not convenient for Mr. Lethers to come here one of the clerks can take it over for his signature. That I think settles the matter, Chittywick. From Monday morning next you may consider yourself as the firm’s messenger-boy.”

Charlie gasped some words of gratitude.

“You will start with ten shillings a week. If at the end of three months your conduct is satisfactory you will get a rise of two shillings.”

As Charlie left the Manager’s office the clock struck six. It was knocking-off time, and with a glad heart and a thankful one the lad ran off to his granny’s cottage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MESSENGER-BOY.

It was a proud and happy Charlie that drew rein at William's door on the following Monday morning and received the congratulations of the clogger and his wife. A very spruce and bright-faced Charlie it was that rode up the Ridingdale High Street, and a very well-groomed pony that he rode.

But it was a rather shame-faced Charlie who stopped at Kolverston's, the confectioner, to pay a bill for his master. He was wondering how much they would remember of the past, and if by any chance some of his delinquencies were forgotten. The past was not very remote, and even Charlie had found out that kindnesses are the only things some people forget. Perhaps he had not reckoned sufficiently on the wonder-working effect of a little gold. His past experiences had not included the paying of bills. But Kolverston actually said, "Thank you, sir," and smiled most amiably as the boy handed the money across the counter.

"What will you take, Master Chittywick? what will you take? Help yourself, sir, help yourself!"

Charlie gasped for breath. He thought at first that the confectioner was making fun of him.

"Try a hot pie, Master Charlie. They're straight from

the oven." The man was actually getting a plate for him. "You used to be—I mean you'll like one of these, I know. And it's a cold morning, isn't it, sir?—though sunny."

The boy could not refuse the delicacy he had so often coveted and alas! so often stolen—though his pride strongly tempted him to do so. Of all the Ridingdale tradesmen, Kolverston had been the most down upon him—and with reason. And of all the floggings he had ever received for pilfering, the one this man had given him scarcely six months ago was the severest. Yes, from where he stood he could see the table in that inner room upon which two stalwart men from the bakehouse stretched and held him while their master mercilessly plied the rod. Yet here he was to-day invited to help himself—almost compelled to the eating of a hot pie! Nay, to make the matter quite complete, Kolverston had actually left the shop and its contents in his hands!

It was only when Charlie had finished his pie that the confectioner returned.

"You'll make my compliments to Mr. Paleworthy and say I'm much obliged—won't you? Yes. Well I'm glad to see you getting on so well, I'm sure. I wish you all good luck and hope you'll rise like your predecessors have done."

But when Charlie had shaken hands and left the shop, the man laughed softly to himself and said: "Hope the youngster'll turn out well, that I do. But I'm mighty glad Paleworthy didn't ask *me* to give him a character."

Charlie scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry that there were no more bills for him to pay in Ridingle. In one way it was very pleasant to demonstrate to his old acquaintances that he was a trusted servant of the great firm of Kittleshot and Son, and that he was by way of becoming a man of business rather than a factory-lad. At present he had made only two trifling changes in his dress. He still wore fustian, but a clean, broad turn-down collar was round his neck and, as became a rider through muddy lanes, on his legs were a pair of leather leggings specially made for him by William. He was on trial, he knew. Mr. Paleworthy had said so. And if he failed as messenger—he had not the slightest intention of doing so—he could go back to his old work in the factory.

Yes, it was undoubtedly very pleasant to be riding on pony-back down the High Street that he knew so well, his shining clogs set in a pair of equally shining stirrups—warmly and comfortably clad and with the certain knowledge of a hot meal awaiting him at Hardlow. Yet it was at present a little trying to come across the people who had known him from childhood—the tradesmen he had so frequently robbed, the very folk who taking the law into their own hands (luckily for him) had subjected him to various forms of corporal and ignominious punishment.

But now that he was no longer cold and hungry, now that he could regard himself as a personage, however humble, he was not going to give way to self-pity. He was not a hero to himself by any means. It never once occurred to

him that at least one action of his life was tinged with heroism. By breaking away from the occasions of sin, by deliberately taking up an inferior social position, by disregarding that public opinion which makes so many men and boys contemptible cowards, he had done an act braver far than many of the daring deeds that are rewarded with a badge of courage. A tide had come in his affairs and he had taken it at the flood. Whether it would lead to fortune or not he did not care to inquire. Already it had led to happiness—quite enough for one who had experienced misery.

But this was not all. He had not resented the helping hand of a man, humble and homely, whom he had been urged by his relations to avoid. Nay, he had placed himself knowingly and willingly—gratefully even, under an influence that, young as he was, he clearly saw could not but be an influence for good. At the moment of his sorest need, grace had been offered him and he had not rejected it.

As he urged his pony into a gentle trot and rode back to Hardlow in the glow of the April sunshine, he soon forgot his little embarrassments of the morning and thought himself one of the happiest of living boys. Everything might have been so very different, he told himself. Supposing he had not left Ridingdale when he did! What might not have happened? It was unlikely that people would have remained as tolerant of the growing lad as they had been of the pinched and hungry small boy. Imprisonment and life-long disgrace must have come sooner or later. The mys-

tery of life did not weigh very heavily upon him, and he did not torture himself with useless speculations; but the thought suddenly came to him that the taking of a single false step in this life was often fraught with irreparable disaster. When we are young, the first realization of a great truth, however commonplace, startles us very considerably. A single action, and we are made or marred! It was an awful thought. He had at the time seen the ruin that would certainly have come upon him if he had yielded to the temptation of stealing the boots: it was only now that he understood how much of his present happiness had come about through the taking of one decisive step in the right direction. Yes, the one truth was great and as real as the other.

It had been an effort, of course. He remembered so well how on that famous night he had stood outside William's shop trying to make up his mind. With shivering limbs and chattering teeth he stood looking through the gas-lit window at the rows of new clogs—fresh and bright and clean and strong and, as the boys who wore them had so often told him, so “gradely warm.” William would hang nothing outside his shop-door, so here there was no temptation to steal. He had walked away from the window again and again, trying to make up his mind, trying to be brave, trying to pocket his pride. He had looked at the matter from every point of view—his own, his mother's, his sisters', that of Ridingdale in general. Then he had seen William come into the shop from the little sitting-room

behind, and knew that in a few minutes the shutters would be up.

Well, he had made the plunge and here he was—already out of the ranks of the factory hands, riding in the April sunshine on a glossy well-fed pony—entrusted with bills to pay—the envied messenger-boy of a prosperous firm!

He had passed through Timington and was riding leisurely over the long and rather lonely stretch of road that lies between Timington and Hardlow, when he saw in front of him a figure that reminded him of his father. Now as a little lad Charlie had always preferred his father's company to that of his mother. In the Chittywick family, true parental love was almost unknown. The wonder is that filial love had any place at all. Peevish complaints and simulated hysterics on the part of a mother do not usually win a child's affection; a mere tolerance however good-humoured, and occasionally indulgent, on the part of the father do not command a lasting love.

Yet in a careless sort of way—just as careless, in fact, as that of the man himself—Charlie had at one time liked his father. Always there had been times when the boy knew that it was dangerous to go near him; fortunately these were generally the seasons when Charlie did not want to see him. Mr. Chittywick's drink habit was of long standing—all the more deadly perhaps because, as his neighbours said, he was never known to be drunk, or sober. "Mellowed with liquor," as the wretched phrase is. Chittywick was the soul of generosity. Approached at the right

time of the day, Charlie had soon discovered that there was nothing his father would not give him—when he had the money.

But two years of starvation and suffering, to say nothing of the increase of knowledge that must come to a boy in his teens, had brought about a change of feeling in regard to the father whose neglect of home and family had become a by-word. Anger indeed arose in the boy's heart as he checked his pony and contemplated the tall-hatted, frock-coated figure in front of him. Father or no father, Charlie realized that the man he must needs speak to was a monster of selfishness.

Boy-like, however, his anger died away when Mr. Chittywick took him by the hand and told him he was glad to see him.

"Come now, this is something like," said Mr. Chittywick, patting the pony's neck. "I was hardly prepared for this, Charlie. You're getting up in the world, if your father isn't. They told me you were working in the factory. In fact I should have called to see you if I had happened to come round this way before. It's not my beat, you see. There's another agent on this road, only just now he happens to be laid up. Well now—tell me about yourself, my boy."

It was impossible for the lad to forget that the man walking beside him was his father; impossible to forget that this father had often been very kind to him in the past;

impossible to forget that in years of plenty the ex-school-master had been generous and indulgent.

So Charlie explained his new duties in great detail, and with something of the gladness that had come to him with the bright April morning.

"Capital!" exclaimed the father, "first-rate! So you don't carry all your brass upon your clogs, Charlie. You've got plenty there," he continued, laughing and tapping the boy's toe-tips with his stick. "And they trust you with quite big sums of money, eh Charlie?"

"It wasn't very much this morning, father: only a pound or two. But Mr. Paleworthy told me I might sometimes have quite big bills to pay. You know, father, I had to get somebody to stand surety for me."

"Indeed! for how much?" The question was asked with an eagerness that Charlie did not notice. He was not watching his father's face.

"Twenty pounds, I think. Something like that. Mr. Lethers did it for me."

Mr. Chittywick became suddenly silent. For some time he walked by Charlie's pony without speaking.

"I'm afraid, father, I shall have to be trotting on—if you don't mind. It must be getting on for twelve."

"Just one minute, Charlie," said the man. "I'm very seedy this morning, and my firm has behaved shabby towards me. Couldn't you lend me a shilling or two till I see you again?"

Charlie's face flushed angrily as he put his hand in his pocket and took out some coppers.

"This is all I have in the world till next Saturday," said the boy, extending his hand. "I paid William Lethers for these clogs last week—he wouldn't let me pay him before. I had only two shillings left then, and I gave them to mother."

"Blast your mother!" the man burst forth in one of those sudden explosions of rage that come to the nerveless toper—"Curse your mother, and you too!"

And with this parental malediction ringing in his ears, Charlie rode forward to Hardlow.

CHAPTER XII.

TAKING ADVICE.

Charlie could not keep back his tears as he told his grandmother of the encounter on the road with his father.

“Eh, my lad,” she said, “it’s just him all over. That’s *just* our William! He’s my son, and he’s your father, Charlie, but the truth’s the truth. He wa’ just t’ same as a little lad. An’ t’ older he got, t’ worse he got. It wa’ alis Self, Self, Self, wi’ him. Yer mother niver axed me ought about him, or I could a’ told her ’ow things ’ud be. A lad as treats his mother like he treated me, is sure to be a brute to his wife. I could a’ foretelled all this—as sure as if I was a prophet. He niver darkens my door now-a-days, and though he’s the only son I iver ’ad I dunna want to see him. My gels has all been a comfort to me, thank God; but *him*—well, lad, let’s talk about summat else.”

She did not talk about anything else for some time to come, and Charlie heard things about his father that astonished and disgusted him.

“You mind when yer father started that there school? You wa’ only a little lad at t’ time, but you mind—don’t yer? Well, wheer d’ye think he got t’ money from? I know wheer he got it from. It was my poor ’usband’s

savings as started him. It wa' money what we'd been savin' iver since we was married. He borrowed it, o' course. It was to bring us in ten per cent. he said. Yes, Charlie, yer poor granddad 'ad to go on workin' at t' factory for years—long after he wa' fit to do ought—to make up that money. I say 'make up,' but o' course he niver did make it up. If it warn't for t' bit o' pension they 'lows me I wouldna have enough to live on, little as I want. Lucky we'd bought this bit of a 'ouse years afore."

"I never knew about this, granny," said Charlie. "I knew that he'd borrowed money from Mr. Armstrong—a good deal, but I didn't know he'd had anything from you."

"Yes, he took in Mr. Armstrong nicely. He pretended to make him a partner or a shareholder, or somethin'. I don't think the man ever saw a penny of his money again. But Armstrong is a rich man and my poor 'usband warnt. We'd nothing to start with but his wages. We was careful and savin' and we put a bit away, and your father got 'old of it and it all went—every shillin'. I don't want to set a child against his own father, and that father my own son; but mark my words, Charlie—he's got a dirty lane to go through for robbin' his poor old parents."

Never before had the grandmother said more than a few words about his father, and Charlie very rightly gave her credit for much self-repression. He was sorry that he had unwittingly set her talking on so painful a subject. It was delightful to think that this side of the Dale was not in his father's regular beat. Charlie thought it most unlikely

that he would meet him again on the high-road to Hardlow; if he did, he wondered a little what would be the best thing to do. Silly and foolish as his mother was, he would never again allow her to be cursed in his presence without making a strong protest. But what would that mean? It would mean an altercation with a strong, a passionate, and a drunken man. Of what use to bandy words with a drunkard? That at a certain stage of his habitual tipsiness his father could be both violent and cruel, Charlie well knew.

When he went to the priest at Ridingdale on the following Saturday, the lad asked for advice.

"My poor boy," said Father Connelly, "you have a difficult part to play. I know few things more painful for a child than to have unworthy parents. You remember what I said to you when we were talking about the fourth commandment? You owe obedience to father and mother in all that is not sin. Moreover, you owe them a very special reverence and affection. The wish to stick up for your mother is the most natural thing in the world—is what any boy with the smallest spice of manliness about him would always do. But, my dear lad, mind *how* you do it. The 'how' of a thing is most important. Don't provoke your father to violence of speech or action."

"He gets into a passion so quickly, Father. He always did."

"I know, Charlie. People who drink in that way generally do grow violent quickly. Watch him carefully.

One thing is quite certain—under these circumstances you are not obliged to give him anything out of your poor little wages. If you have anything to spare, give it to your mother. She is not blameless, but she is much more weak than wicked.”

“Suppose I overtake him on the road, Father—would it do for me to ride past and pretend not to see him?”

“I wouldn’t do that, my lad. Check your pony and say ‘Good-day’ to him. Do it as nicely as you can, but don’t stop to chat with him. Your time is not our own, Charlie: you know that, don’t you? You are on business for your employers, and genuine business of that sort is the best possible excuse for riding on.”

“Fortunately,” said Charlie when he had thanked the priest for a piece of advice that he meant to follow, “I don’t think it is likely that my father will go on that road very often.”

“So much the better,” said the priest. “But now, whatever happens, don’t forget to pray for him.”

Charlie determined not to say one word about his father to Mr. or Mrs. Lethers. There was no good in it, he argued, and though he freely told them all that concerned himself he would not mention that disturbing meeting on the high-road. He had plenty of nice things to say and he would say them. It wanted only a fortnight to Easter, and that would be a delightful time for him. Then Mr. Paleworthy had told a clerk, who had told a junior, who, being a good-natured fellow (God bless him!), had repeated it to

Charlie that—he was both smart and intelligent. In fact when the boy had gone into the chapel and made his confession—he had been going every fortnight since January—he put away all thought of his father, and feeling very peaceful and happy was just in the mood to promote happiness and peacefulness in others.

To meet little Freddy Armstrong in the lane that led from the chapel to the village was, in the circumstances, delightful. Freddy greeted him with a cry of joy.

“I am so glad—so glad I met you, Charlie,” the little boy said taking the other’s hand in both his own and clinging to it.

“And I’m glad to see you,” said Charlie smiling down upon the rosy little face and sparkling eyes. “Haven’t seen you for an age!”

“O but I’m gladder than you, Charlie—ever so much. I’ve got somefing to tell you—somefing you’ll be glad to hear.”

“Hurray! Let’s hear it, Freddy.”

“I’m going to Hardlow School after Easter. Faver said so. Muver wanted me to wait till after the summer holidays, but faver says ‘No, he’s older than his age and why not let him go just as the fine weather is coming on.’”

“Freddy, that’s just grand.”

“Isn’t it, Charlie. And I’m sure to see you sometimes, aren’t I?”

“Sure to, Freddy.”

“And I can give you fings—can’t I?”

"No, old chap, you mustn't do that. You see, now-a-days I don't want things. I'm never hungry now, Freddy. And besides, you'll want your lunch badly when you have to walk to Hardlow and back every day."

"O but I'm going to have dinner at school wif the uffer boys. But you'd take an orange or an apple now and then—wouldn't you? Say *yes*, Charlie!"

Charlie laughed at the little fellow's earnestness.

"Thanks, Freddy, ever so much. Perhaps now and then. But if I'm not careful I shall get fat. Don't you see how fat I'm getting?"

"No," said the little boy, looking Charlie up and down. "You look very nice, but you're not fat. I'm fat. Faver says so. He says the walk to Hardlow will do me good."

"You're plump, old chap, that's what you are. Not fat. You're as plump as a little partridge. But the walk won't do you any harm. I hope the lads will be nice to you. There'll be quite a gang of Ridingdale boys going to Hardlow soon. Three of the Joyces go now, and two Romptons started after Christmas. Then there's the Methodist minister's son, and two of your minister's lads, and young Nuttlebig—that fellow's a caution!—and lawyer Hipkins' sons, and—

"Tommy Kolverston," put in Freddy. "You know Kolverston the confectioner?"

"Rather! And there's young Harwood the grocer's son, and Johnny Stevens from the Ridingdale Arms. You'll have plenty of company, Freddy."

"Yes," with a little sigh. "I don't fink I like all of 'em."

"Dare say not. Some of 'em are pretty rough chaps. But they're sure to be kind to you. You'll tell me if they're not—won't you, Freddy?"

The little boy looked up into the face of his hero and protector with a smile of confidence.

"There's not one of those chaps I couldn't lick if—" he was going to say "If I liked," but remembering his recent confession and the effort he was making to be good, he substituted—"If I were forced." "And you know, Freddy, one is sometimes forced to fight. Not often, of course. But if I saw any fellow bullying you I'd go for him like a shot. By-the-way, does Skinny Bobington ever bother you now, Freddy?"

"I fink he's left Ridingle, Charlie. Perhaps he goes to work. I see him sometimes on Sundays, but I'm wif faver then."

"Well, that's all right," said Charlie, as they came to the end of the lane where they had to take different directions. "We must say 'good-bye' now, mustn't we?"

But the little lad was clinging to Charlie's hand.

"I want to say somefing, Charlie. May I?"

"Of course, Freddy. Why not?"

"I—I don't quite know how. It's somefing *very* particular, Charlie."

"Well, say it, old chap!"

"You won't—you won't be—"

“Do you mean I won’t be offended? Course I won’t, Freddy.”

“No I didn’t mean that. I knew you wouldn’t be offended. ’Twasn’t that. I mean you won’t—or at least you needn’t be—I mean you won’t go to—”

The child could not bring it out. Releasing Charlie’s hand, Freddy began to dive into an inner pocket of his jacket. Presently he brought out a piece of writing-paper, very much creased and crumpled.

“This will tell you, Charlie. Please read it when I’m gone. I couldn’t say it.” With a final squeeze of Charlie’s hand Freddy ran off at full speed.

Charlie opened the paper with a smile, saying to himself, “What a funny, old-fashioned little chap he is!”

Twilight was coming on, but he could easily read the big if rather irregular writing on the paper.

“Kathlick’s need not go to hel caus the minnister said so, for Christ says I came not to call the just but sinners to repentance, F. Armstrong.”

Charlie spelt through the paper two or three times before he refolded it and placed it in his prayer-book. He smiled, but his eyes were moist.

“Bless his good little heart!” Charlie said to himself as he turned into the High Street. “Somebody’s been talking to him about me, of course. And I suppose they told him I was already damned. Dear little chap! That would hurt him like anything. Freddy’s love is of the right sort—the kind that Father Connolly was talking to me about last

week. And it's so funny Freddy should have written some of the very words that the priest said to me when I first went to him and told him what a bad lot I was. 'You are just the very one Christ came to save,' he said. 'He came not to call the just, but *sinners*.' Perhaps God doesn't want me to forget those words."

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUR MONTHS LATER.

“Come on, Flossy, old chap, you’ve got to go to Ridingdale whether you like it or not.” Charlie was talking to the pony. “Yes, I dare say you *would* like to stop in this nice cool stable; but then, you see, you can’t. Hot weather makes you lazy, doesn’t it? Never mind, Flossy, I shan’t ride you hard this afternoon. You shall take your own time. Master says we needn’t hurry the least bit. It’s too hot for that.”

Flossy was not a young pony, but he was a serviceable and a trusty one, and Charlie was proud of him. His coat shone like Mr. Paleworthy’s silk hat. The roomy stable was delightfully cool and clean. Outside, the hot August sunshine lay heavily.

“You’ve got gold and bank-notes to carry to-day, Flossy—lots of ’em. We’re going to pay for your grub, old chap, and the straw you lie on. A pretty penny that comes to every three months! Yes, I know you don’t eat all the oats and hay and stuff. There are those big brothers of yours that live next door, aren’t there? All the same, Flossy, you’re got a decent appetite for a little ’un.”

Having this particular stable all to himself, and the little saddle-room next door, Charlie had acquired a regular habit

of talking aloud to the pony, half persuading himself that the beast listened and understood. It never occurred to the boy that a two-legged listener might be within earshot.

"Now then, Flossy, you're all right," the boy went on, as he finished buckling the belly-band of the saddle. "I'll make myself ready in no time."

Going to the saddle-room he gave a hasty brush to his clogs, which were already in a high state of polish, washed his hands and face, and turned down his shirt sleeves, and put on a clean white linen jacket and a straw hat. Then he took out of his pocket a handful of papers.

"Yes," he said to himself, "better call at Marson's on my way there. It's the biggest bill of the lot. The others are all in Ridingdale. Glad there's not much silver this time. These linen pockets are not very strong, and a bag bulges." He referred to a list containing the names of the people he had to see and the amount due to each. "Yes," he continued as he refolded the paper, "it's a lot of money this time. Nearly twenty pound!"

It was like Flossy to want to go off at a smart trot, but Charlie would not hear of it.

"There's lots of time, Floss, so none of that. Didn't Mr. Paleworthy say we'd got the whole afternoon before us, eh? If it comes on to rain you shall trot as hard as you like, but—well I'm not sure. We might have a storm, of course."

In the office, and in the yard too, thunder had been freely prophesied for that indefinite time known as "sooner or

later." It was indeed hot enough for anything, and the stillness of field and high-road was profound.

"If it does rain," Charlie was thinking, "I hope it will come on while we are at Marson's."

Most people liked to go to Farmer Marson's house. It lay just a little off the high-road, about half a mile on the Hardlow side of Timington. You turned out of the highway, passed through two meadows and found yourself at a big farmhouse—whose stack-yard was a marvel and whose orchard was prodigious. Charlie thanked his stars that, for some reason or other, this was one of the orchards he had never robbed. Once before, he had paid a bill there for the firm, and the memory of Mrs. Marson's hospitality and kindness was a happy one. She had not only forced him into a chair and made him eat a "nuncheon" which removed from him the smallest desire for dinner, but she had given him a half-crown—for himself. He found out afterwards that she had never offered his predecessor more than a shilling. The matter had afforded him a good deal of pleasure. He had had so few friends since his father's failure, and had made for himself so many enemies of a certain kind, that he was very slow indeed to think that anybody except the Lethers and little Armstrong could really care for him. Yet without a doubt Mrs. Marson had been very nice.

The truth was that the good motherly woman had pitied his pale face and admired his quiet respectful manner and general air of freshness and tidiness. It would indeed have

been hard to say whether the pony or his rider were the better groomed. Charlie was one of those boys who at their worst never look really untidy; now that his rather small but neat figure was well clad he looked much superior to the average messenger-boy. There were many questions Mrs. Marson would have liked to put to him; but he had seemed a little embarrassed when she asked him if he were a Hardlow boy, and so she had forborne any further catechism. She knew very few people in Ridingdale, and only went "into town" for Sunday Mass and Saturday's market. Most of her friends and relations, and those of her husband, lived beyond Hardlow, and though she and Mr. Marson always exchanged a word or two with the Lethers and several other Catholics whom they met at the chapel door, they were not very intimate with any Ridingdale folk.

The hot dusty high-road looked curiously empty and lonely. There was not a soul in sight as Charlie turned the corner of the short cross-road that led from Hardlow. For half a mile or so there was very little shade: further on, an almost continuous row of trees threw their shadows half across the highway. In distant fields, to the right and to the left, men were reaping.

Flossy soon lost his inclination to break into a trot, and Charlie rode him with a loose rein.

"We'll have our little canter coming back," the boy said as he patted him and then broke into a whistle—remembering that in an hour or two the shadows would lie right across the road. Now that he was in motion and on the

pony's back he was sensible of a slight breeze, and its refreshing coolness made him thankful.

Two thoughts worried him a little as he rode along. Last Saturday he had found his mother more tearful than usual. It was some time however before she told him that they were under notice to leave the house in High Street. The boy thought they ought to have left it long ago, but he did not say this. He gave her the few shillings that he could badly spare, knowing very well that in comparison with her debts it was like pouring a glass of water into the sea. But lately she had clung to him a little more, and for that he felt grateful. From his sisters he expected nothing but abuse, and he usually received it.

The other thought puzzled more than it worried him. Not only had his father been in and about Hardlow several times within the last fortnight, but he had twice called at the factory. Each time Charlie had been out. Since his first encounter with the man last April they had met only once: the second meeting had been anything but a satisfactory one. As on the first occasion Charlie had overtaken his father and had given him pleasant greeting. "You're just the fellow I wanted to see," Mr. Chittywick began, laying his hand on the bridle rein. "I'm sorry, father," Charlie had replied quickly, "but I can't stop. I must be back at the office before one o'clock." A sharp tug at the bridle had the double effect of throwing off the man's nerveless hand and of starting Flossy into a quick trot. It was fortunate for Charlie that the trot was a quick

one. A stone came crashing after him but it fell short—startling but not hitting the pony. Foul language had followed the stone, but the rider was soon out of hearing.

One thing the boy had noted before he rode on; his father had lost much of his former decent appearance. The tall hat was, in a way, too glossy; it was also battered. The black frock-coat was dusty and seamy and worn: the trousers were frayed and baggy; the man's linen was dirty. Mr. Chittywick was beginning to look the drunken spendthrift he really was.

The thought of all this saddened the lad as he rode along; it robbed him of a little of the joy of the day and of his errand. In a grateful sort of way, he had felt proud to be trusted with what seemed to him such a large sum of money—certainly the biggest amount he had ever handled. How unlucky it would be for him, he thought, if his father began to haunt Hardlow and the factory! His own past was deplorable enough; the past and present of his father were as bad as they could be. What would Mr. Paleworthy think of the man who was never sober, and who had so narrowly escaped prosecution for fraudulent bankruptcy?

But why the thought of his old enemy Skinny Bobington should keep coming into his mind that afternoon, Charlie could not imagine. For some time past Skinny had seemed to have some irregular kind of employment at Hardlow; Charlie had met him rather frequently. They had not renewed hostilities: Charlie saw no reason why they should do so. Skinny was a bully, and Charlie had more than

once thrashed him, but he bore no ill-will towards the ungainly lout who lay in wait to frighten children and terrorize little school-boys. Of course there were certain things that Skinny knew about the other—things that could damage Charlie's reputation in Hardlow; but then, who would care very much for what was said by a lad whose own reputation was notoriously bad, and who had already served a term of imprisonment?

It must of course be a hallucination, but as Charlie rose for a moment on his stirrups to look over the hedge he was riding along he thought he saw Skinny Bobington standing in the middle distance of the field. To convince himself that he was mistaken, he stopped the pony and stood for some time looking over the hedge. There was not a soul in sight. To be sure there was a clump of trees not very far from the spot where he thought he had seen Skinny, but—well, it must be all nonsense, he told himself. Perhaps the heat, or the amount of money in his pockets, was making him a little nervous. Luckily, he thought, in another ten minutes or so he would be at the gate that led to Marson's farm. Once there he would rid himself of by far the greater part of his cash.

"So now, Flossy," he said to his pony, "you can stretch your legs a bit if you like. No, don't overdo it, old man," he continued as in response to a gentle touch of the boy's wooden heels the pony broke into a canter. "There's lots of time, Flossy. Oh, very well, if you like it I don't mind!"

Flossy seemed to like it very much and his rider gave him rein. Charlie enjoyed it too. It was still shady, and the rapid motion stirred the air into coolness. Disturbing thoughts left the lad's mind as the pony quickened its pace and sent the warm blood coursing swiftly through the rider's body. Flossy broke into a little gallop and Charlie did not check him.

Then with awful suddenness, there was a stoppage and a crash. Pony and rider were both thrown violently to the earth!

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Motionless on the high-road lay Charlie Chittywick. The white dust was already soaking up a thin stream of crimson. Its fore-legs hopelessly entangled in a mesh of thin wire, the animal lay on its side plunging violently, its hind-leg keeping up a convulsive and an incessant kicking.

But pony and rider were not alone. From opposite sides of the road two figures had run to drag Charlie out of the reach of the pony's heels.

"The young devil's broken his neck, I'm afraid," said Mr. Chittywick. His shaking hands were already in Charlie's breast-pocket. "No, Skinny, you get away, — you! I'll do this. You keep a sharp lookout!" The trembling drunkard had already transferred the gold and bank-notes to his own pocket. "But wind up that wire, Skinny! Keep clear of that pony!"

Very still, and with closed eyes, lay the messenger-boy.

About his head a little moat of blood was slowly forming itself. Mr. Chittywick's face had grown almost as white as his son's.

"Somebody comin' !"—Skinny called out in a hissing whisper.

"Which way?"

"O'er t' meadows from Marson's!"

Mr. Chittywick said no more in response. Stooping down, he crept back towards the high hedge behind which he had been concealed for the last hour. As soon as he found himself in the field, he buttoned his frock coat about him and made a bee-line for Hardlow Station. Swiftly and noiselessly he ran unseen by his confederate. Skinny had taken his post behind the hedge on the opposite side of the road.

And on the white high-road lay the still bleeding body of Charlie Chittywick.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FATHER'S CRIME.

Just at the very moment that Flossy succeeded in disentangling his forelegs from the thin wire that had been stretched across the road, Skinny Bobington became aware of two very unpleasant facts. One was that Mr. Chittywick had made off, and without giving him his promised share of the robbery. The other fact was that not only was a cart being driven from Marson's farm down to the high-road, but that along the road from Hardlow a carriage was rapidly coming nearer to the scene of the tragedy. Skinny's retreat by the road was thus completely cut off. To complete his discomfiture, the pony regained his feet and set off in the direction of Timington—blood trickling from its wounded fore-leg at every step.

There seemed to be only one thing to do, and the frightened lout did it: his only chance of escape was for the present to lie low. He could not be sure that he had not already been seen by the occupants of the trap that was driving from Marson's: he determined not to be recognized by the people in the carriage—which was sure to pull up, for Charlie's body was stretched across the middle of the road. Moreover, loose coils of wire were lying about, and if the

carriage horses got their feet entangled, another catastrophe might be expected. In the confusion and excitement of that, the young villain told himself, it would be easy to get away. But he very much hoped that the farm trap would turn down towards Timington when it reached the road, and not towards Hardlow. The hedge was not a very thick one, and on the field side it had no ditch. Skinny lay flat down and awaited complications. As the carriage approached he just allowed himself to look up for a moment and caught sight of Colonel Ruggerson's coachman.

Very frequently afterwards the Colonel was heard to say that he thanked God for giving him a coachman with a head on his shoulders. Some distance off the man had seen an object lying across the road: when both he and the footman recognized it as a body the driver pulled up. His delicate mistress was in the open carriage. "Tell the master quietly that there's something wrong ahead," he said to the footman, "and ask him if I shall drive back a bit."

"By all means," said the Colonel getting out of the carriage. "I'll just go forward, my dear," he said to his wife. "Probably nothing very serious. Thomas," he commanded the footman, "you come with me."

The trap from the farm had already reached the road and had not turned off for Timington. As the Colonel and his footman came up to the unconscious Charlie, Mr. and Mrs. Marson were jogging towards the scene of the robbery—mildly wondering whatever could be the matter.

They were driving out to tea at the house of a farmer-relation who lived just beyond Hardlow.

"Stop!" called out the Colonel as the trap approached. "Don't come any nearer!" He and his footman were rapidly clearing away the lengths of broken wire.

"Come on now!" shouted the Colonel as he knelt down in the dust beside Charlie. "Thank God!" he exclaimed excitedly, "he's still alive! Yes, he's breathing! Don't *you* come, Mrs. Marson, let your husband get out. Yes, I can feel the beat of his pulse!"

"John," commanded Mrs. Marson as she descended heavily from the trap, "drive into Ridingdale as hard as you can and bring Dr. Nuttlebig."

"Why couldn't *you* do that and let your husband get out?" asked the Colonel testily. "You'll only faint or—or something."

"Where's your carriage?" demanded Mrs. Marson of the Colonel—utterly ignoring his remonstrance.

"Just up the road."

"Then send it into Hardlow for Dr. Brown."

"But Mrs. Ruggerson is in it," he was beginning: a look from Mrs. Marson checked him.

"You needn't frighten *her*, man. Can't the coachman leave her at the Cedars—or somewhere?"

With wonderful submission the Colonel gave the order to his footman.

"Very sensible suggestion, Mrs. Marson. We're just half way between Ridingdale and Hardlow."

"Get some water!" she ordered.

It became perfectly evident to the Colonel that this case was in the hands of Mrs. Marson—very capable hands too, if he had only remembered; but he was somewhat excited.

"Nay, nay!" she called out as he began to march up the road in search of water, "there's none that way. You'll have to go through this hedge. There's a pond in the corner of the meadow."

To the utter detriment of the gown she reserved for summer tea-parties, Mrs. Marson was kneeling over Charlie, one hand on his pulse, the other raising his head ever so little from the ground. The blood had ceased to flow from the wound in the forehead, but she greatly feared that to move him would be to set the life-flood running afresh.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, raising her eyes for a moment, "there's somebody else coming. Well, they'll be useful."

There was somebody going too. In passing through the hedge the Colonel had not seen the prostrate Skinny; the youth knew that he would be discovered when the old soldier returned. He realized that this was his last chance. He must make a dash for liberty.

"Who's that?" called out the Colonel in the tones of a drill-master. He was returning with his white tall hat filled with water. "Stop, sir!" he thundered at the top of his voice. "Halt!"

But Skinny had not the smallest intention of halting.

"Stop him!" yelled the Colonel as he hurried towards the hedge along which the youth was flying. "Stop that fellow!"

He was shouting on the mere chance of being heard by somebody in the distance: he could not see that half a dozen Ridingdale lads were coming down the road. As he crept through the gap they were in sight.

"Catch that chap!" he called out to the boys as he put down his water-filled hat by Mrs. Marson's side. "After him all of you," he commanded as he advanced to meet them. "Bring him back here to me! He's running by the side of this hedge. It's the fellow they call Skinny."

Like one boy they turned back and began the chase.

"There's been devil's work here this afternoon," said the Colonel to Mrs. Marson as he knelt opposite to her by Charlie's side; "and depend upon it that villain knows something about it."

"Thank God! here's the doctor " exclaimed Mrs. Marson. "In his own trap, too. My husband must have caught him up on the road."

Two traps were raising a cloud of dust in the near distance, but the doctor was in advance of the farmer.

It was some time before the usually chatty doctor uttered a word.

"Pretty bad spill!" he remarked at length. "Might have been worse, though. Collar-bone's broken. And a leg. But this head-wound is the worst. Pony kicked him, I suppose? How did it happen?"

"Haven't a notion at present," the Colonel said. "But look here!"—pointing to the wire that now lay in a heap under the hedge.

"That means villainy! Dastardly business! Has he been robbed?"

"We haven't examined him yet. We were afraid to touch him lest the wound would open afresh. It's only the congealed blood that stops it."

"Quite right," said the doctor. "And now whose, or where, is the nearest house?"

"Mine, of course," put in Mrs. Marson. "Can he be moved?"

"If it's done with the greatest possible care, yes," replied the doctor. "But are you sure you can take him in? He won't be well *this* week, remember!"

"John," called out Mrs. Marson to her husband, "come and help us to lift this child!"

"Wait, wait! Mrs. Marson. Don't be in too great a hurry. My trap is the lowest. I'll just take the seat out. And I've got a rug that we can lift him upon."

Never since the earliest years of his babyhood had Charlie been handled so tenderly. Each of the four people took a corner of the rug, and with the utmost gentleness lifted the unconscious lad into the low basket-trap.

"Now if Mr. Marson will lead my nag very slowly we will get on," said the doctor. "The Colonel, perhaps, will follow with your trap."

"Lend it to me, Mr. Marson," said the Colonel, jump-

ing into it. "I want to see if those lads have caught that scoundrel, Skinny."

Slower than a funeral procession moved the doctor's trap towards the farm: faster than the chariot of the Son of Nimshi drove the Colonel in the direction of Hardlow.

But he had not to drive very far. Walking in a compact body and at a swinging pace came the boys, and in their midst was Skinny Bobington, securely held by the two biggest Joyces, strapping fellows of sixteen and eighteen. One glance at the lout assured the Colonel that if he had not caught the principal ruffian he had at least secured a confederate.

"He said he'd tell us all about it, sir, if we'd let him go," the elder Joyce remarked when the prisoner had been handed into the trap: "we didn't make him any promise—did we, lads?"

There was a chorus of "Not likely!" and "'Course not!"

"Quite right," said the Colonel. "If he's got any sense he'll keep his mouth shut for the present. He'll be in the Hardlow lock-up in a few minutes."

Sitting at the back of the trap tightly held by his two captors, Skinny began to whimper:

"I niver touched him. Wish I may die if I did! I've got nowt on me: you can sarch me if y' like. Owd Chittywick copped all t' money and sloped."

"*Old Chittywick!*" exclaimed the astounded Colonel as he checked the horse. "Good God! You don't mean to

say—— but there, I've no right to cross-examine you at present. You'd better shut up."

It was with considerable difficulty that the Colonel refrained from asking questions. The thing seemed too monstrous for belief. That the elder Chittywick was a dishonest man and a drunkard was well known: that with violence he should rob his own son on the highway seemed past belief.

"I shall be here for some little time," said the Colonel to the two Joyces, once they had given Skinny into the charge of the police. "You'll take the trap back to Marson's, won't you? And if you will kindly call at the Chestnuts and tell Mrs. Ruggerson that I will join her in half an hour or so, I shall be much obliged."

At the Colonel's instigation the police at once made inquiries at Hardlow Station. Fortune had seemed to favour Mr. Chittywick. He had just caught the 3.55 train—at any rate, a breathless man, trembling and exhausted with running, and one whose description tallied with that given of him by the Colonel, had flung himself into a carriage just as the train moved off. The train was for "Liverpool way."

"Don't spare the telegraph," the Colonel urged the police. "He's making for Liverpool you may be sure. He'll be on board a New York boat in an hour or two. While you telegraph I'll go and see the factory manager and find out how much money the poor lad had about him."

News of the catastrophe had just reached Mr. Pale-

worthy. A farm-lad from Timington had caught Flossy and brought him back to the factory stables. Mr. Paleworthy's inquiries after the injured messenger were mingled with groans over the lasting disgrace to the firm. The Colonel said something that sounded like "Hang the Firm," and bade Mr. Paleworthy be thankful that the lad's neck was not broken.

"As it is, I expect it's touch and go," he went on. "How long he'd been lying there before I came up, I haven't an idea. All I know is that he'd lost more blood than a lad of his physique can afford to lose."

The Colonel said nothing to Mr. Paleworthy about the elder Chittywick.

"We've arrested a youth who, I'm pretty sure, knows all about it, and he's now in the Hardlow lock-up. There may be another arrest before long. How much money was the lad carrying? Eighteen or nineteen pounds, you say? Hum! Just so! Well, I must call at the Police Office again and then join my wife."

CHAPTER XV.

HEARING THE NEWS.

Half an hour later the Colonel's carriage turned off the high-road and drove up to Marson's farm.

"He opened his eyes a few minutes ago," said Mrs. Marson hurrying out into the hall to meet him, "but he's gone off again. The doctor has driven into Ridingdale to get various things. He's coming back for the night. I'm almost glad Dr. Brown was out. The child will be all right in Dr. Nuttlebig's hands."

"And in *yours*," said the Colonel. "It's very good of you, I'm sure."

"Just common charity—that's all," Mrs. Marson rejoined.

"Perhaps I'd better not see him, just now. I've kept Mrs. Ruggerson waiting so long. But I shall ride over after dinner."

"My husband has just gone off to fetch Father Connelly, but he'll hardly be back before eight o'clock. It's such a long way, and of course John may not find him at home."

"Good gracious! I'd quite forgotten that the lad's a Catholic. 'Course he is!"

"He's been regular enough at Mass for the last eight or

nine months," said Mrs. Marson, the tears coming into her eyes as she spoke. "And at Communion. John and I have noticed it."

"So he has—so he has, now I come to think of it. You see, he had been such a——however, poor lad, I hope we shall save his life."

"We're going to have a good try," Mrs. Marson rejoined as the Colonel made for his carriage.

It was nearing six o'clock. Big clouds were gathering in the distance over Hardlow and the Colonel hoped that he and his wife might reach home before the storm overtook them.

Within the farmhouse Mrs. Marson set open every possible door and window, for the evening was hot with that late summer heat which only a strong breeze can abate.

Very still and white lay Charlie on a sofa of a downstairs sitting-room—breathing more evenly and regularly now and making Mrs. Marson hopeful that his unconsciousness might be that of a deep and healing sleep. She had taken off his clogs, otherwise he lay just as she had found him, his linen jacket and white collar plentifully soaked with blood. Two servant-maids came and went at Mrs. Marson's bidding; she herself would scarcely leave him for an instant. Rosary in hand she watched, and prayed for the speedy coming of the priest.

Little by little the room darkened, and then through the open windows came the ominous pat-pat of the rain-drops

that precede a summer storm. Over the valley to the south lightning had long been flashing.

The storm broke with sudden and frightening fury. Mrs. Marson thanked God for it. Already the temperature had fallen. A quick strong breeze sprang up, and the roses that wreathed the latticed windows dashed their heads against the glass, shedding a thousand petals upon the flooded soil.

Nearly five miles beyond Hardlow, Mr. Marson was battling with the storm, his somewhat spirited horse showing fright at the lightning and making the long journey a thing of difficulty. Sitting in silence beside the farmer was Father Connelly bearing the Blessed Sacrament. To Mr. Marson in his anxiety it seemed as though the powers of Hell were trying to hinder the priest in his sacred task, for the nearer they got to Hardlow the more heavily fell the rain, the more vividly flashed the lightning.

At about seven o'clock, in the very height of the storm, Dr. Nuttlebig returned to the farm. Mrs. Marson had little enough to report; but the doctor seemed well pleased with his patient's pulse.

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It was inevitable that the news should reach Ridingdale in an exaggerated form. "Charlie Chittywick's pony had been found riderless at Timington: Charlie himself lay dead upon the road." This was the report that reached the Miss Chittywicks as they sat at tea in Miss Rippell's back parlour.

Their first impulse was to rush off and break the news to their mother; from this they were dissuaded by the practical and kind-hearted Miss Rippell. An hour later the wisdom of waiting was demonstrated. Colonel Ruggerson called at the stationer's shop and gave as hopeful a version of the matter as was consistent with truth.

"Everything depends upon the amount of injury done to the brain," he said, "and Dr. Nuttlebig may be able to report upon the case in an hour or two."

Mrs. Chittywick received the news with curious composure. She was sorry, of course, and shed a tear or two, but she was not nearly so disturbed by this very serious accident as she had been by Charlie's getting work in a factory. She was pre-occupied too with her own griefs. Three days hence the furniture of her house was to be sold. The girls were looking out for a small, and of course a genteel, cottage.

"It really seems like a judgment upon Charlie," Mrs. Chittywick remarked after a time. "If he hadn't gone to that wretched factory this wouldn't have happened."

"Well, we can't have him in here, that's flat," declared Maud. "We've got quite trouble enough without having him to look after. And the cottage we're thinking of taking simply wouldn't hold him. There's only a bed-room apiece for the three of us—though how we're going to furnish them godness only knows."

Yes, these pretentious and lazy girls could hear of their brother's accident—an accident, the Colonel hinted, that

might prove fatal—without being greatly moved. On the morrow they heard an item of news that drove every other thought from their mind.

How it reached Ridinglee nobody could say, but long before Monday all Ridinglee knew that Mr. Chittywick had been arrested in Liverpool and was being brought back to Hardlow on a charge of highway robbery with violence. Some argued that the crime would prove to be one of attempted murder. For the present, the Miss Chittys made it their chief duty to keep the news from their mother. For themselves, they did not, and would not believe it. There was some wretched conspiracy against their father, they argued. The rumour had been started by somebody who wanted to injure him, they told Miss Rippell and one another, and somebody would be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law. Late in the afternoon, however, their complacency was disturbed by hearing a scrap of dialogue that came in through their open window from the High Street. It reached the ears of their mother.

“ Well, it’s all up wi’ owd Chittywick, I reckon.”

“ En they got ’im at ’Ardlow yit? ”

“ Ay, that they ’ev. I’ve joost bin talkin’ to a chap what saw ’em bring ’im from ’Ardlow Station. Two bobbies i’ plain clothes ’ad got him. Folks i’t street ’issed at ’im.”

“ He’ll be gittin it pretty ’ot, I reckon.”

“ Yo may be sure o’ that. And sarve ’im reet!”

Meanwhile, the injured boy was lying in great pain on a bed that had been prepared for him in the ground-floor room at the farm.

Between seven and eight o'clock on the previous evening he had recovered consciousness. Half an hour later Mr. Marson and Father Connelly had arrived, both wet to the skin. The storm was passing over and the sufferer recovered his senses in a temperature that was cool and restful. He smiled a little and his eyes grew brighter as the priest put on his stole and sat down by the couch. The last Rites were administered to the now distant diapason of the thunder and the far gleam of the white sheet-lightning.

Charlie lay very still after this, though Mrs. Marson could see that now and then his lips moved with prayer. Once she distinctly heard him whisper, "My Jesus! I'm so sorry!" Father Connelly knelt by him for some time, saying and suggesting prayers, and in half an hour or so the sufferer was sleeping a somewhat fitful sleep. About this time the Colonel paid his promised visit.

Long before midnight Dr. Nuttlebig declared that there was certainly no immediate danger, and tried to induce Mrs. Marson to go to bed.

"Go to bed yourself, doctor," she replied. "I know now what to do, and if there is any change I'll call you. I'm not going to bed, I tell you."

The doctor laughed. He had been up late the night before and was very weary.

"I can be just as obstinate as you," he replied. "But

I'll go into the next room and take a short nap in one of those big low chairs."

Father Connelly declared that one of those easy chairs was to him better than a bed, and in spite of Mrs. Marson's remonstrances he would have spent the night in the drawing-room if the doctor had not commanded him to go to bed. He had told the Colonel that he hoped to say Mass at Ridingdale in the morning.

"You were wet through, you know," said Dr. Nuttlebig, "and your clothes will scarcely be dry by to-morrow morning. Mr. Marson's suit is quite *big* enough for you, but—well, the fact is you *must* go to bed."

Dawn shone on a very suffering patient. Scarcely any part of the boy's body was free from pain. It was of the utmost importance that he should lie still—for the sake of the broken collar-bone and, as it turned out, the compound fracture of the leg; but the pain in his head was so great that it seemed as though he could not remain long in the same position. Mrs. Marson soothed and relieved him in every possible way; but he could not help moaning now and again.

Dr. Nuttlebig was amazed at the gentleness of this very substantial lady of five-and-sixty—a strong-minded woman if there ever was one—a mistress who ruled always as if she were master.

"No mother nursing an only child could be more tender or loving," he told the Colonel, who rode over before breakfast.

"Quite believe it," said the soldier. "Rum chaps, these women! Ordered me about yesterday as if I'd been a plough-boy. Ah, here's Father Connelly. Good morning, Father! You're too tired to say Mass for us this morning, I'm sure?"

"I'm just starting for Ridingdale," said the priest. "They're saddling a horse for me now."

"Excellent" exclaimed the Colonel. "I'll ride ahead and let as many people know as I can come across. I shall be there to serve you, Father."

Week-day Mass was at that time an unheard-of privilege at Ridingdale. Considering the circumstances, the congregation was a good one. The Colonel had called upon William Lethers the night before in order to give him the latest news of Charlie, and late as it was, when Mrs. Lethers heard there was likely to be Mass on the following morning she sent her husband and sons to announce it to all Catholics who lived within reasonable distance. The result was edifying.

"One good, at least, will come out of this evil," said the Colonel to Father Connelly as they sat at breakfast. "We must have a resident priest here."

"I'm glad you say *at least*. I fancy more than one lasting good will be the consequence of this outrage. As for a resident priest here——"

"It's no good, Father, we must have one. Perhaps, like most people, I think of myself first of all, but I'm also thinking of my wife. Her health is a real anxiety just

now. Now with the quickest horses I have got I could not reach you much under two hours; and then there's the return journey. Besides, I might not find you or your colleague at home."

"Mr. Marson spoke much in the same way last night."

"Yes," continued the Colonel, "what he said set me thinking. Marson's a very good fellow. He'd certainly help with the money, and he's not a poor man by any means. He's the only farmer Timington way who can get anything out of his land."

"He was happy in the choice of a wife," said the priest smiling.

"You're right. She's a woman of some education, but she does the work of three or four dairy-maids. There's not a more hospitable housewife in the Dale, but she hates extravagance like sin."

"Isn't it sin?"

"Well, of course. You know what I mean, Father. You should see the extravagance and pretentiousness of some of our farmers at this end. And I know that one or two of them are verging upon bankruptcy. Where Mrs. Marson would offer you good home-brewed ale, they bring out champagne. When she asks you to dinner she gives you a slice of excellent beef, or a chicken that she has cooked herself: they send an order to Kolverston for what in their vulgarity they call a 'slap-up dinner.' I know 'em. Unhappily their number is increasing. But I'm getting off

the line. It's a resident priest we're talking about. And we want *you!* "

"Well," said Father Connelly laughing a little at his host, "you are very kind, of course. But you know that nothing in this matter rests with me."

"True; but what I mean is — *you* know the circumstances, and the Bishop is sure to consult you. You know how far the need is a real one. And you can tell his lordship from me that, between us, Mr. Marston and I will raise the necessary funds. There's nobody else except Lethers, and he is not a rich man. Never will be, I fancy. He's too good-natured."

"He'll have his reward: probably a double one," said the priest: "one here and one hereafter. Good-hearted people always have, even though they have their disappointments. But now, Colonel, do you think it is too early for me to call upon poor Mrs. Chittywick?"

"Yes," answered the Colonel promptly, "I think it is. If, as you kindly say, you are prepared to spend the day and night with us, or rather with the Marsons, you cannot do better than put off your visit to Mrs. Chittywick. I've a special reason for saying so, though I can't give it to you for the next three or four hours."

True to his resolution to say nothing about Mr. Chittywick until the matter became common property, the Colonel had not even mentioned it to Father Connelly. A few hours later the arrest of Charlie's father became the talk of the town.

"Yes, I'll have a look at the lad," said Dr. Nuttlebig in a low voice to Mrs. Marson that same evening, "but I'm not anxious about him now. He'll suffer, poor chap, but he's young and we shall pull him through. I'm more than anxious about his mother, though. She's had a sort of stroke, and I'm afraid her brain is, or will be, affected. I've driven over really to fetch the priest."

"Poor thing!" sighed Mrs. Marson, "the double shock was too much for her. And no wonder!"

"Well, as far as I can make out she took the news of the lad's injury pretty composedly. It was hearing of her husband being in prison that upset her. The girls hadn't told her, you know, and she heard of it by accident. Somebody talking in the street, I fancy."

As priest and doctor drove back to Ridingle, the former begged to be told the worst about the condition of Mrs. Chittywick.

"Well," said the doctor, "I don't think she'll ever get over it. She was always a feeble-minded woman, poor thing! And though she was never the confirmed invalid she thought herself, she led too inactive and unwholesome a life to be very strong. Of course the man has always been a scoundrel and a brute, but the wife is anything but blameless. She's one of those wretched women so common in this country who will ape the lady—at the cost of the shopkeeper if he's fool enough to let them."

"I know—I know," sighed the priest. "But at the

present moment what do you think of her mental condition? ”

“ Well, she’s sane enough now ; but I shan’t be at all surprised if she has a second stroke before long. Then she will be a helpless idiot, poor creature ! ”

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. MARSON'S WAY.

Charlie was struggling to say something, and after a time Mrs. Marson caught the word "Flossy."

"Was that the pony, my dear?" she asked. "O well, he's all right. He was taken back to the factory by a Timington lad. But you mustn't talk, child. Mr. Paleworthy has just been to inquire about you. He's very sorry for you, Charlie. Oh, and Mr. Lethers has just been. I was to give you his love and his wife's. We can't let anybody see you at present, my dear, you're too ill. Please God, you'll soon be all right again. Only it will take time, Charlie, it'll take time."

Charley fixed eloquently grateful eyes upon Mrs. Marson. There was much he wanted to say, but the pain was so acute, his weakness so great, he could not talk—even if his nurse would let him.

"How did you find the poor woman, Father?" Mrs. Marson asked in a whisper when the priest returned.

"Very ill indeed, poor thing!" he replied. "But, thank God, not too ill to make her confession. I am more than thankful that your doctor came to me when he did. While I was anointing her she began to wander. I hope to see her again in the morning. In fact, I shall have to spend

the remainder of the week either here or at Ridingle. The only question is—at which place can I be more useful?”

Mrs. Marson argued that they had room enough in their house for half a dozen guests, and no lack of help; but when the priest pointed out that by staying with the Colonel he would be within easy walking distance of the church, and that Mrs. Chittywick's needs just then seemed greater than those of her son, Mrs. Marson gave way.

The Colonel had placed a horse at the service of the priest, and Father Connelly spent most of the following day—now by Charlie's bedside and now by his mother's. For the Hardlow Petty Sessions were sitting, and Mr. and Mrs. Marson and the Colonel had to give evidence. The entire neighbourhood was greatly excited, and the small court-house was soon crowded to inconvenience.

From the beginning, the youth Skinny showed the greatest anxiety to give evidence against the older prisoner—whose appearance in the dock, wretched and miserable as it was, did not evoke the smallest sentiment of pity. The giving of evidence lasted several hours, and the prisoners were remanded.

In the dusk of that same evening, Mrs. Marson had another visitor—Charlie's grandmother. At first she did little else but weep, and Mrs. Marson found it hard to comfort her.

“He wa' allis a bad 'un, wa' my son,” she sobbed. “A lad what's bad to his mother is sure to be bad to his wife.

An' now he'd done his best to murder his own child. An' in t' beginnin' t'wa nowt but pride. Let 'appen what would, he mun be t' gentleman. Then he went from bad to wuss and took t' drink. He took ivery penny of his feyther's savin's, he did. It was on t'strength o' that Mester Armstrong lent him money. I'd saved a pound or two myself, but I wouldna let him 'ev it. And now and now—d'ye think they'll 'ang him, mum? I mean if t' lad dies?"

"Oh, we'll hope it won't be so bad as that," said Mrs. Marson. "Besides, I don't think the boy will die, thank God. Dr. Nuttlebig seems very hopeful now. But your son's wife is very ill, you know. You are going to see her, no doubt?"

"Not if it would save her life!" cried the old woman fiercely.

Mrs. Marson looked shocked.

"Don't say that," she pleaded. "I know you don't mean it. Poor Mrs. Chittywick has had a stroke, and is in a very bad way indeed."

"Sarve her right!" said the old woman savagely. "She turned up her nose at me all the days of her life—wouldn't speak to me if I met her i' Ridingdale street. Catch me going to her! She's as bad as her husband i' one way."

But Mrs. Marson had made up her mind that Charlie's grandmother should see her son's wife. The argument was a long one, but Mrs. Marson won it—won it by firm but patient pleading.

"Those girls are perfectly incapable of nursing," the

farmer's wife had said. "If you don't go and nurse the poor woman you'll never forgive yourself. And you certainly won't like to think of it when you are on your own death-bed."

So old Mrs. Chittywick suffered herself to be driven over to Ridingdale on the following morning—only to find her daughter-in-law incapable of speech.

"It can only be a matter of a few days," the doctor said. "She had a second stroke in the night. She has no stamina at all."

On the very day that her husband was committed to take his trial at the Autumn Assizes, Mrs. Chittywick died. And Mrs. Marson noticed as a singular coincidence that on that very day her patient took a wonderful turn for the better.

"Poor lad!" she said to her husband that night as they sat alone together, "he little knows what trouble is in store for him."

"Does he suspect his father at all?"

"Not the least bit as far as I can guess. He never saw the man on the road. Skinny said, you remember, that Chittywick was behind one hedge, and he behind the other. They only came out after the crash, and I suppose Charlie was then unconscious. He hasn't said a word about it."

"He's asked after his mother?"

"Lots of times, and I've always told him, truly enough, that she was ill. I shan't know what to say now. It will

be hard work to tell the child that his mother is dead and that his father is a convict."

"Does that little lad of Armstrong's come every day?"

"Every day of his life, dear little chap! I've never come across such an old-fashioned child in my life. I told him to-day that if Charlie went on as well as he has been doing, in another week or so he should see him. You should have seen the light in his eyes!"

"Funny thing," said the farmer as he puffed at his pipe. "One would have thought Armstrong's son and Chittywick's wouldn't have had much in common."

"I asked him one day if his father knew that he came here. He shook his head in his solemn little way. But 'mother does,' he said."

"Armstrong's still hoping that Chittywick will be hanged. He was talking about it at market last Friday. I told him there was no chance of that."

"What did he say?"

"Said he was sorry to hear it. There are things that a man like Armstrong can never forgive; one of them is—being *done*. Chittywick must have played his cards well to have taken in Armstrong."

"I think I shall let Mrs. Lethers see Charlie to-morrow. She's been over ever so many times, and her husband too. She won't tire him—she's nursed her own children."

"She's a good sort of woman," said Mr. Marson, "but she's got a fairish tongue. She must mind and not let out any bad news to the lad."

"Do you think all woman are fools, John?"

"Not *all*, my dear. If I'd thought that I wouldn't have married," chuckled Mr. Marson. "But you'll allow that women who know when to talk and how, are not as common as they ought to be."

"I've known men with foolish tongues," said Mrs. Marson sharply, and giving the new night-gown she was sewing for her patient a sudden twist.

"So have I, my dear. Difference is that when a man makes a mistake he knows about it and tries to correct it. A woman is more reckless. She'll do or say anything just to create a sensation, or to relieve her feelings. Men forgive much sooner than women."

Mrs. Marson was silent for a few seconds. She was thinking of old Mrs. Chittywick.

"Say, 'than *some* women,' John," she ventured. "Certainly, never until the other day did I hear a mother denounce her own son. If a mother won't forgive, no human being can."

"In this case, she's got a deal to forgive, remember."

"I know. Still, I don't like to hear a woman saying such things about her own flesh and blood. But what I can't understand is, John, why this poor lad is so different to his father and the rest."

Mr. Marson shook the ashes out of his pipe and stepped to the open window. Summer seemed reluctant to pass away. The night air was still balmy, with just the suggestion of coolness that makes for refreshment.

Sitting sewing within the rays of the shaded lamp Mrs. Marson looked up, only to see her husband standing before the long low lattice and gazing out into the night. The irregularly-shaped sitting-room looked bright and homely. The lamplight fell upon late summer flowers in vases, and upon much old-fashioned furniture clad in warm crimson.

"Don't forget, Kate, that you know very little about that lad," said Mr. Marson without looking round.

"I know more than you do," she answered quickly. The little jerk that she gave to the flannel night-gown was quite unnecessary.

"I doubt it," was all that Mr. Marson said in reply.

"Who's been talking to you, John?"

"Nobody in particular," he said, coming back to the hearth-rug. "But don't make too much of him. Of course, I'm glad enough that the poor lad should have been brought here. I don't grudge him anything, goodness knows. But don't spoil him, my dear. He's got his living to get, remember."

"John, you're talking nonsense! How can you spoil a child who is so weak and ill that he can't lift himself up in bed? Spoil indeed!" she went on with an indignant ring in her voice: "why it's not quite a month since he was brought into this house more dead than alive. And look you here, John Marson, he's not going out of this house until he's able to look out for himself. You can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Mr. Marson was refilling his pipe with something blacker

and stronger than his wife's words. It was time for his nightly stroll round the homestead.

"I'm saying nothing against the lad," he remarked quietly, between the puffs. "And if I did I know you'd have your own way with him."

"You're right enough there, John," she retorted as he left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

FREDDY'S WONDERMENT.

"But do Catholics say prayers on week-days?" Freddy Armstrong was asking the invalid.

"Of course," smiled Charlie, "don't Protestants?"

"Night and morning they do. I don't know about other times. There's chapel on Wednesday nights, of course. Perhaps, Charlie," continued the little boy, stroking the hand that he was holding, "perhaps you pray because you are ill."

"When you're ill you have more time," said Charlie. "But Catholics pray when they are quite well—that is, good Catholics. You see, Freddy, I wasn't a good Catholic. Perhaps I'm trying to be now. Mrs. Marson's a good Catholic: so is Mr. Marson. She's just been teaching me how to say these."

Charlie held up a string of beads, the first rosary Freddy had ever handled. The only part of it that seemed to attract the little boy was the crucifix. Looking from it to the bigger one that stood on a little altar at the foot of Charlie's bed, he said quietly—

"That's our Saviour on the Cross. The nails must have hurt ever so much—eh Charlie?"

"Yes, but it wasn't only the nails. It was the hanging

on the hands all the time—three hours, you know. And bleeding all the time! I've thought about it a good deal lately. You see, Freddy, I bled a lot myself. That's one reason why I'm so weak."

Freddy looked from the crucifix to Charlie, and from Charlie to the crucifix.

"I see," said the little boy. "I hadn't thought of that before. But I'd only seen it in a picture. This makes you feel it more—doesn't it?"

"I think it does. It makes you more sorry for Him. And Father Connelly says that when you begin to be sorry for Him you begin to love Him, and to be sorry that you hurt Him like that."

Charlie suddenly turned his head away from Freddy, but not before the latter had seen his tear-filled eyes. The invalid was still very weak.

Freddy was silent—partly in sympathy, partly in sheer wonderment.

"I didn't know—I never heard,"—he began after a pause—"I thought Catholics didn't care for our Saviour. I thought they only prayed to the Virgin Mary."

"Never believe anything, Freddy, that you hear about Catholics until you are certain that it's true. Protestants don't mean to tell lies about us, *but they do*, you know. Heaps of big black lies. And you can always find out whether a thing is true or not, Freddy, if you like to take the trouble."

Who shall say whether the entrance of Mrs. Marson was opportune or otherwise?

"I mustn't let you stop long to-day, my dear," she said to Freddy in a kindly way. "He ought not to talk very much at present. The poor head is a good deal better," she said, beginning to re-arrange the bandage that encircled Charlie's forehead. "And you can see him again in a day or two. He'll soon be getting on like a house on fire—won't you, Charlie?"

"Yes, Mrs. Marson," he replied, lifting affectionate eyes to her kind motherly face.

Freddy went out of the room like a child in a dream. What a strange unaccountable world he found himself in! His little mind had during the last quarter of an hour been turned upside down, so to say, and inside out. Protestants told lies! Not only Tom the cobbler, but his own father and mother had told him "big black lies"! It was an amazing thought. And in one particular at least it was without any doubt a fact that they had told lies. Catholics did worship God—did believe in the Saviour. Nay, it really seemed as though they thought more about Him and loved Him better than—well, better than anybody Freddy had yet come across.

And what kind things they did too. Freddy had recently heard a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Surely Mrs. Marson *was* the Good Samaritan! Charlie wasn't related to her at all; yet there she was—tending him like a mother. And she a lady too, in a way; at any rate well off and with

grown-up and married sons and daughters, while Charlie was the son of a man who was in prison!

Catholics prayed on week-days too—even in the afternoon! And even if they were not ill. And they kept before their eyes constantly the Figure of the Saviour on the Cross. Freddy had been amazed to find Mrs. Marson praying with Charlie—who was so very much better and not at all likely to die. Close to the invalid's hand were all sorts of things that spoke of religion. Freddy had looked at one or two books that lay on the bed. One was a prayer-book, and a picture fell out at a place which was headed "Jesus Psalter." He opened another small manual whose title was *Of the Imitation of Christ*. What the beads might mean, Freddy had no notion, but evidently they indicated something good because there was a cross at the end of them.

Freddy was glad of the opportunity of walking home alone. The walk from Hardlow School was a larkish sort of thing as a rule, quite unlike the morning journey, during which most of the boys seemed pre-occupied and a few were somewhat depressed. Some tried to learn lessons on the road: most of the lads looked over their grammar or their author. They were not a very brilliant set. Ridingdale farmers and tradesmen who thought that Hardlow School would provide brains as well as tuition, were soon disillusioned. Doting mothers who imagined that a capacity for study could be bought like a new bonnet, were quickly undeceived. The social distinction of going to Hardlow

counted for something; but the purse-bearer often moaned over the small return he received for hardly-earned money.

Freddy kept one vivid and indelible picture before his mind's eye. This "composition of place" remained with him when he reached home and sat down to tea. It scarcely left him when he began to prepare his lessons. It followed him upstairs to bed. It came back to him with almost thrilling distinctness when he knelt to say his prayers. But when he laid his head upon the pillow he could see nothing but—the Figure of Christ upon the Cross and a boy with bandaged head turning tear-filled eyes to the wall.

Before the eye of his mind, that picture remained for many long years.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE TRIAL.

It was late October and the Assizes were over.

Very thankfully the principal witnesses reached their homes, though Mr. Marson could not help noticing that his wife seemed somewhat depressed. The Colonel had travelled with them as far as Hardlow Station, and on the journey he and Mr. Marson had discussed a subject in which the latter's wife took no part.

"I'm so glad the child began to ask questions for himself," Mrs. Marson said to her husband as they sat down to tea. "It made it all the easier for me just now to tell him about the sentence."

"How did he take it?"

"He sobbed a good deal, poor fellow, but he was quiet and calm when I left him. Last week when he asked me what I thought his father would get, I told him what the Colonel said—that it was likely to be penal servitude for life. So when he heard that it was only fifteen years——"

"Means the same as life to a man like Chittywick, you know," Mr. Marson interpolated.

"I know, John. But the lad said, 'I'm so glad it isn't more than that.' Really, he's a wonderful child. I don't think there's a grain of malice in him. It's not only the

sickness and the pain, I'm sure, for the stronger he gets—and he really has got on this last week—the more forgiving he seems to be. When I told him that Skinny had got off with twelve months' imprisonment he said, 'Poor Skinny, he was always cruel to animals and children, but I never thought he'd do anything quite so bad.'

Mr. Marson was making a hearty tea; his wife seemed to have but little appetite.

"He'll be able to get out a bit, the doctor says, when we get a fine day. Eliza tells me that he only went to bed just before we got back. And it's been a wearing day for him, poor fellow. It was hearing of his mother's death that threw him back; but what could I do? He saw it in my face, I'm sure. People always tell me that I've got a tell-tale face. But when the child asked me point blank, 'Mrs. Marson, I feel *sure* that my mother's dead, and that's why she doesn't come to see me'—well, John, what *could* I do?"

"You did quite right, my dear," said Mr. Marson, helping himself to another egg. "It was bound to come out sooner or later. And it was better that he should get it out of you in bits than that you should have to break it to him."

Mrs. Marson was silent, and though her husband did not look at her he knew that she was crying. He was just a little apprehensive. He guessed that there was something on her mind, and he had reason to believe that the something would soon be upon her tongue. Unluckily for him, he could plead no sort of appointment or engagement.

The harvest had long been gathered in. His dairy was an extensive affair, and the Marson butter was a thing Ridingdale people almost fought for; but his wife was so careful in the selection of her maids that, though she supervised every detail and made up much of the butter with her own hands, she could now and then leave home with the comfortable feeling that in her absence all would be well.

"John," she began suddenly after a long pause, "the lad has been fretting a good deal lately: and it's bad for him in his weak state. He's got enough to fret over, we know. To all intents and purposes he's an orphan now."

"He's been as good as one this long time, according to William Lethers," said Mr. Marson.

"Perhaps he has. But now he's got to face the world all alone. He might as well have no sisters at all as those two silly girls. It's going on now for three months since he was carried into this house, and they've been to see him—just twice. And I heard yesterday that the old grandmother is leaving this part of the country for good. She's got a widowed sister living near Manchester, and they're going to keep house together. And you know, John, I asked Mr. Paleworthy my own self if he was going to take the lad back again: he said he was sorry but he really couldn't. John, I ask you—what is the poor boy to do?"

It had come at last and Mr. Marson had to face the inevitable. He could not say that his wife was premature in the matter, for Charlie was just entering into the state of convalescence.

"I had a chat with the Colonel about the lad coming down," said Mr. Marson, dealing himself out some generous spoonfuls of marmalade. "Didn't you hear what we said?"

"No, I didn't. How is one to hear anything in a train? And the Colonel always talks as if he'd got a plum in his mouth."

Mr. Marson did not look up, but he knew by the tone of his wife's voice that her tears were dry. She poured out a cup of tea and stirred it at leisure.

"Well, you know, my dear," he began, tentatively, "the Colonel was very kind about it. He was wondering if the lad wouldn't like to enlist, or——"

Mrs. Marson had not intended to break her saucer. She was in the act of raising the cup to her lips when her husband spoke, and she set it down again with such force that the china split into segments.

"Well, of all the——"

"Wait a minute, my dear! You're so hasty. I was just going to say that we thought if he didn't like the army he might care to go to sea."

"John Marson, you're a born idiot!" exclaimed the lady with heat. "And as for Colonel Ruggerson, I'll drive over to Ridingdale this very night and give him a bit of my mind."

"Do be reasonable, my dear," Mr. Marson pleaded. He had had an excellent tea, and could afford to look at things calmly. The dinner that he and his wife had eaten at York

was a failure, for though they had gone to a good hotel, the Autumn Assizes had brought more people to the ordinary than the waiters could properly serve. But a high tea at his own table had made up for the noonday deficiency.

"The lad has got to earn his own living," he went on, "and it isn't at all likely that he'll want to stay about here."

"And why not?" the lady demanded strongly.

"Well, my dear, surely it stands to reason."

"I don't see it," she retorted. "I see no reason at all for his going away. What has *he* done? Did *he* rob his master? Did *he* try to murder anybody? And is he a street Arab that he should be shunted into the army or out to sea? Haven't you said yourself that you'd never come across a lad with better manners? You said one day that he'd got bad blood in him. So have we all. 'There go I—but for the grace of God,' as the good man said when they were taking a criminal to be hanged. John Marson—I'm ashamed of you!"

"Father Connelly, ma'am!" Eliza announced—to the relief of Mr. Marson.

The priest had been unable to help overhearing Mrs. Marson's last sentence. Moreover, he found her somewhat flushed.

"Very glad to see you, Father," said Mr. Marson.

"So am I," his wife significantly echoed.

"This is my first visit since settling down at Ridingdale," said the priest. "I would have called earlier in the day only that I knew you were in York. And I ought perhaps

to have spared you this evening. You are tired after that long journey, Mrs. Marson, are you not?"

She would not admit that she was in the least tired and she could not refuse to give the priest a report of the trial.

"We were very glad to come away, Father," she said, after describing the Assize Court proceedings at some length, "and very thankful it did not take longer. But now," she went on, "there's something else to settle. What's to become of this poor lad?"

Mr. Marson fidgeted uneasily in his big cushioned chair.

"Ah!" said the priest looking straight into the fire, "that is rather a serious question."—He knew now what was the nature of the little tiff he had interrupted.

Mr. Marson cast imploring eyes at his wife, as though begging her not to give him away. Father Connelly scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry that he had called.

"What do you think of the lad, Father?"

"Oh, I think he's ever so much better—considering everything; though Eliza tells me that he has been very depressed to-day. No wonder, poor child!"

"I didn't mean that, Father Connelly," said Mrs. Marson. "I want to know, and I want my husband to know what you think of Charlie's character."

The priest smiled.

"Don't you know that you should never ask a priest what he thinks about any person," he said. "And in this case I am sure, Mrs. Marson, that you have had opportunity

enough to form a very accurate judgment as to the boy's character. How many weeks has he been under your roof?"

Mrs. Marson began to reckon and found that it was more than twelve weeks.

"Three months! That's a good long time. And you must remember that sickness is a very trying time. Have you found him very fractious and difficult, Mrs. Marson?"

She could not answer for a minute or so, but while she dabbed her eyes the priest looked straight into the fire. Mr. Marson put on more coal.

"I've never had such a patient in my life," she said at length. "I've nursed my own brothers and my own sons through different ailments, but though they are my own flesh and blood I must say that not one of them was so gentle or so patient or so grateful as this poor child. Even when he was in the greatest pain—you remember those first three days, Father?—he used to try so hard not to moan and not to move; yet the doctor said himself that the lad was in agonies. And I don't believe that from the beginning till now he has ever asked for a single thing."

The priest was thinking that probably Mrs. Marson had always anticipated her patient's wants; but he did not interrupt her.

"Then the way that child has prayed not only for himself, but for his father and mother and sisters. Once he got a little better and fell into the way of saying the beads—well, I'm pretty sure he said them every hour. He

had never handled them in his life before, and he told me that he didn't think his mother had a pair. He said very little about religion unless I spoke of it, but he always seemed so glad to have anything that was holy and good. And you know yourself, Father, how delighted he always was when you came to see him."

Father Connelly nodded and smiled. Mr. Marson had closed his eyes, but his wife knew that he was not asleep. John Marson's drowsy-time did not come until ten o'clock, and at present it was not seven.

"People talk about boys being giddy and careless," she went on, "and some of them are all that and much more; but when suffering touches them they can be as thoughtful and prayerful as grown-up folk. Yes, and more so. God hasn't so much to forgive them as He might have if they were older. I know how it was with my own lads. I shall never forget one night as I was going up to bed, passing our George's door and hearing him sobbing as if his heart would break. He was thirteen or fourteen at the time, and his tears were about as rare as snow at midsummer. I went to his bedside as I always did at that time, and found his pillow soaked with tears. But I could get nothing out of him except, 'O mother, I *do* want to be good.' I kissed and comforted him and he got quieter after a time; but I couldn't remember that he had been particularly naughty that day. He told me afterwards that nothing had happened, only that he wanted to be ever so much better than he was."

"I quite understand," said the priest. "That is sometimes the way God speaks to the soul of a boy. You used to laugh at me, if you remember, when I told you that George would certainly be a monk."

"Well, Father, it didn't look like it at one time—did it now? For if ever there was a mischievous young monkey in this world, it was our George. He wasn't a bit like his brother Bernard: I had great hopes that he would get a vocation."

"So he did, Mrs. Marson."

"Ah, you know what I mean, Father. Marriage is a vocation in a sense, especially such a marriage as he made: but I'd thought of something higher. Then there's Frank: whoever would have thought of him as a priest? Why I don't believe he ever got through the summer holidays without having a good thrashing from his father. Yet it was only yesterday that I received a letter from his Bishop saying, 'Your son is a priest after my own heart.' Then there are the girls ——"

Mr. Marson appeared to wake up at this point, though it is certain that he had not really slept. The conversation was drifting into a safer channel and the farmer was quite prepared to join in it.

"Show Father Connelly that last letter you had from Lucy—perhaps I ought to say Mother Mary Scholastica, but it's such a mouthful."

"I will before he goes, John. Nay, Father, don't look at your watch. We want to talk to you about something

important. We've talked to you often enough I'm sure, about our own children. And thank God, they're all right. They're all settled for life, and we've no anxiety about any of them. Two of them went to Heaven when they were babies; two of them are married; the other three are trying to save souls. We are lonely without them, God knows. We're not old folks yet, but we are getting on. Father," the good woman cried, raising her voice ever so little, "I can never part with this child, I may say this orphan, that God has sent me. And I won't."

The priest glanced at Mr. Marson. Again that good man had shut his eyes. Father Connelly asked himself if he was really called upon to take sides in a question of this sort, and if so—which side ought he to take? He was silent for some moments.

"I hope, Mrs. Marson," he began at length, "that you won't come to any decision before consulting the boy's own feelings in the matter. He may already have some plan of action. Boys are very close about such things, you know. Have you spoken to him already?"

Mr. Marson's eyes opened quickly and fixed themselves upon his wife.

"Not a word," she replied. "I've often wanted to. I've been on the point of doing so often enough. He seems to know that Mr. Paleworthy can't take him on again, and I think it worries him. That's just why I'm anxious to have something settled."

"But," asked the priest hesitatingly, "may I ask—in

what capacity—or rather, in what way you purpose to help the boy?”

“I want to adopt him as my own,” she said with great decision.

Mr. Marson suddenly pulled out his watch, looked at it hastily and walked out of the room without a word. A stranger would have concluded that the farmer was going to keep a forgotten engagement. But the priest and Mr. Marson were not strangers.

“Please excuse him, Father,” Mrs. Marson began, anxious to apologize for her husband. “We were having words about this very thing when you came in. Not very angry words, perhaps, though I own I was beginning to feel nettled. John is so funny about some things. It’s not that he has taken any dislike to the lad, and you know that he’s the last man in the world to begrudge what we’ve done for Charlie. And it isn’t that John wants to be rid of him. But over and over again when I’ve tried to come to the point he would not let me. In my own mind I blame the Colonel. He’s been talking to John and persuading him. I couldn’t well hear what they were talking about in the train, but I did catch the word ‘drummer-boy,’ and from what my husband has told me since, that’s just what the Colonel suggested. *Or* the sea. Just think of it! Now I put it to you, Father—Is he the kind of lad to be shunted off like that?”

“I don’t think he is,” the priest replied. “It doesn’t seem to me that he’s at all the kind of boy either for the

army or the navy—honourable as both services are. But on the other hand, Mrs. Marson, you must pardon me for saying that your proposal to adopt him is rather startling. I can understand your husband's feelings on the point. The idea does immense credit to your heart, but then in a matter of this sort we must consult the head as well as the heart. The responsibility of adopting a boy is a grave one—though it is one that I wish more well-to-do childless people would incur. Certainly they would often increase their own happiness a hundred-fold. But in regard to this particular lad——

“What is there against him, Father, that I have not heard of?” Mrs. Marson asked. “I’ve talked to the people who know him best, who’ve known him ever since he was a baby; what is the worst that they can say of him? They say that after his father’s bankruptcy the child had to starve, and that when he had the opportunity he stole something to eat. Well, I’m not saying that he did right. I’m not defending his thefts. He wasn’t exactly dying and so I suppose that his thieving was sinful. But as Mrs. Lethers says——”

“Oh, you’ve been talking to Mrs. Lethers, have you?” the priest smilingly questioned, as Mrs. Marson paused in her speech to regulate the lamp. “You are right in thinking that there is not much concerning Charlie that she doesn’t know. Still I fancy that both she and her husband ought to be regarded as special pleaders, though entirely truthful ones. But then, Mrs. Marson, the boy’s past is not

so much my difficulty as his relationship to a very unhappy and I fear a very vicious, family. Even that is not the whole of my difficulty. What would you do with him supposing you did adopt him?—Of course you will have to find out first if he is willing to be adopted—won't you? But supposing he is—do you suppose that he should go to school, or begin to work upon the farm? Would he be ready to do either? You see, he is no longer a little child. He is fourteen and a half, I suppose, and has already earned his own living. He knows what it is to be independent. All this makes a great difference to a lad. A school-boy of eighteen or nineteen is sometimes a mere baby in character compared with a working-lad of fourteen or fifteen.”

For the first time that evening, Mrs. Marson allowed several minutes to pass without speaking.

“Supposing, Father,” she said at last, and with less than her usual briskness of speech—“supposing the lad is willing to work on the farm, and supposing my husband doesn't set his face against it, and supposing Charlie takes to the work——”

She did not finish her sentence, and the priest took it up with a merry laugh.

“We are *supposing* almost as much as if we were in the nursery—aren't we? But if you were going to add, ‘ Might we not give him a trial as farm-lad and with no mention of adoption? ’—if you ask my opinion of that, I say, do it by all means, and may God bless you for it!”

“Amen. And thank you, Father,” said John Marson.

He had opened the door while Father Connelly was speaking, and had stood holding it until the priest had finished. "That's sensible, Father," he went on, taking his usual chair. "It gives the lad a chance and it commits us to nothing. Does that satisfy you, Kate?"

She sighed a little as she said, "Well, I suppose it *ought* to do."

CHAPTER XIX.

“THE END OF A TWELVE-MONTH.”

Charlie had spent more than a year at Marson's farm. He had watched the procession of the months from a point of vantage. He had shared in the work of each season and in its joys. Autumn found him no longer an invalid, in any sense of the word; no longer a pale-faced convalescent with bandaged head; no longer leaning heavily upon crutch or stick; no longer requiring to be tended and waited upon, but ready, yes, more than ready, to give willing and affectionate service both to—well, it might as well be said—to *father and mother*.

It had already come to that. “If at the end of a twelve-month he turns out to be what you think he is,” Mr. Marson said to his wife, “then we'll reckon him among our own.”

“But it must be twelve months only from the day he was carried into the house,” Mrs. Marson bargained, and though her husband argued against this, he did not insist upon reckoning from the time of Charlie's convalescence.

Long before the year was up it became quite evident to Mr. Marson that the boy was giving them much more than eye-service or cupboard-love. To Mrs. Marson this was no surprise at all; but to the cautious farmer who knew the world and the men who composed it, the slow recognition

of the fact was as amazing as it was pleasing. He said very little to his wife about the matter, and she very prudently refrained from calling his frequent attention to the boy's devotedness. But she saw clearly enough that Charlie was making as lasting a place in her husband's heart as he had already made in her own.

The winter had been a mild one, but January came before the doctor would allow the boy to do any kind of manual work. Mrs. Marson took care that the labour should be light and strictly limited as to hours. He must get strong and hearty, she said, before he began to learn farming. She made him her "head dairy-maid" for the time, and rejoiced to find him both handy and clean. People who deal with milk, she declared, should be spotless and speckless; Charlie satisfied her scrupulousness in this matter. She laughed sometimes at the sight of him in his fresh linen blouse, trying to make as little noise as possible on the tiles of the dairy floor—laughed at the notion of anybody, particularly a boy, thinking that the accustomed sound of clogs could distress her.

He could milk with the best of the men and lads about the place: it was an accomplishment that he had picked up long before she knew him. Very frankly, but with many blushes and some misgivings, he told her one day when and why he had learned the art. He had often found it useful in the days of his semi-starvation. "Of course, mother," he said, "it was stealing: but somehow it didn't seem to be that at the time. I often went into a field and milked a

cow when I was very hungry and thirsty. Two or three times a beast has kicked me over. Once I was caught by a cowman and horsewhipped."

"Poor child!" was all she said as she hastily moved away in order to hide her tears. After that he rarely spoke to her of those two years of bitter days, years of suffering vagabondage.

The winter nights found him at his books, sitting with the farmer and his wife in the big irregularly shaped room, full of crimson-cushioned comfort and lamp-light, warmed with a fire that sparkled merrily on the big old-fashioned hearth. Two or three hours' dairy work with Mrs. Marson and her maids, and three or four hours' study—was the programme that Father Connelly had suggested and that Dr. Nuttlebig approved. Twice a week, sometimes oftener, the priest came over and gave the boy some help, correcting his Latin and French exercises and introducing him to the Second Book of Euclid.

Spring found him still studying and helping in the dairy; but Mrs. Marson would not let him try his hand at the plough—a thing he greatly wished to do.

"Yes, I know you are fifteen," she said when he laughingly pleaded his age. "But you know, Charlie, you don't look it by two years. And you've only got the strength of a lad of thirteen. By-and-bye, please God, you'll get over that; but for the present we are not going to let you do much hard work."

Even when summer came, and the hay covered the

meadows round Marson's farm, she would not allow him to spend more than a few hours a day in the hot sun. The boy felt ashamed of himself as he left the field before eleven in the morning, to return only in the late afternoon; but there was no arguing with Mrs. Marson, and he tried to make up for the trifling manual work by extra diligence at his books.

September came before the farmer declared his purpose to Charlie. Mr. Marson put the matter very plainly, at the same time giving the lad to understand that if there was any trade or profession that he felt drawn to, he was to be sure and mention it at once.

"I don't want to force you into farming, my lad, against your own will. They tell me you're very good at your books and, though book-learning isn't thrown away upon a farmer, I don't believe in people taking up a thing that they are not fond of."

The boy struggled to express himself, but it was some time before the right words would come. For a long time past he had realized that, for some reason or other that he could not account for, both the farmer and his wife were pleased with him. He had regarded himself as a sort of highly-privileged servant—privileged because he had had a painful illness; but that these good people should offer to make him their foster-son seemed beyond belief.

"Mr. Marson," he began brokenly, "if—if you told me that I was your slave for life, I should think myself the happiest lad in the world!"

"Kate!" called out Mr. Marson, opening the door; "come and claim your boy! Yes, that's right, lad, kiss your mother," the farmer said, as his wife hurried into the room and took Charlie to her arms. "She loves you just as if you were her own."

"And so does he," Mrs. Marson declared, as the boy pressed his foster-father's hand between his own small palms and looked up with wet eyes and a glad smile.

The matter was to be their own little secret for a time, Mrs. Marson said, but only for a time.

CHAPTER XX.

COMING OF AGE.

Few of the people invited to Marson's farm for the celebration of Charlie's twenty-first birthday ever forgot that great festivity. Hospitable as the house had always been, it had never before contained so many guests. The married children of the worthy pair were all present, as well as the priest sons of whom they were so proud. It is true that it took Mr. and Mrs. Lethers a good hour or more to shake off the embarrassment of finding themselves sitting at the same table with Colonel Ruggerson; but to Charlie's delight the good couple did make themselves thoroughly at home long before the substantial dinner was over.

As some of the guests remarked, Charlie may not have looked his twenty-one years; some boys of eighteen have seemed older than Mr. and Mrs. Marson's adopted son. But it is certain that he looked radiantly happy and extraordinarily healthy. Youthful his appearance might be: no one could question its perfect robustness and content. If his bright eyes were dimmed now and again, the tears that filled them were tears of gratitude; if his happy smile faded for a moment, it returned with the suddenness of spring sunshine.

The day was a long and a happy one. Mr. and Mrs.

Marson and Charlie had driven over to Ridingdale in the early morning to hear Mass and to receive Holy Communion. From its first hour the day was blessed. By one o'clock the guests had arrived: none of them left until sunset. Some of them remained for the night.

It was a family gathering on a large scale. Nobody was invited for form's sake. Every guest was a relative or a friend of the family. There were speeches, but no reporter was present to take them down. The longest of these speeches, the jerkiest and most involved, was made by Colonel Ruggerson. But it was in many respects a good speech—honest, hearty, and, in a way, inspiring. Perhaps it was fortunate for the Colonel that the reporter was absent. Fortunate for the reporter it certainly was.

The speech made by William Lethers was a masterpiece. To make it thoroughly understood by the reader would necessitate translation and interpretation—possibly a glossary: but it was much appreciated.

"Fellow'd have been an orator if he'd been educated," Colonel Ruggerson whispered to Mrs. Marson at whose right hand he was sitting. A proud woman was Mrs. Lethers when this compliment to her husband was reported to her.

Mr. Marson's speech was plain and direct and not lengthy. Its purport made his wife very happy. He spoke openly of Charlie as his adopted son and—heir to the farm. Even to the boy himself he had not been quite so explicit.

"Never," said Father Connelly afterwards, "never have

I seen so many healths drunk and so little wine consumed."

Perhaps his Reverence's speech was the best of the evening. It provoked more laughter than tears, though the latter were not wanting, and it led to Charlie's first effort in the speaking line. His speech was very modest and very brief.

"Dear father and mother, ladies and gentlemen," he began falteringly, "I can only thank you from my heart and with all my heart. I am and have long been the object of a conspiracy of kindness—kindness such as few boys meet with, I fear,—kindness that is altogether undeserved—kindness that, try as I will, I can never repay. For many a long year to come may God keep us together, and may my dear—"

He could not finish, and in the midst of applause led by the Colonel and prolonged by him the boy sat down with a sob.

Speech-making as an effort and an art was over for that day: spontaneous and merry conversation took its place. The afternoon was almost gone. Tea was to be served at five and every guest was pressed to remain. The men dispersed to smoke and to look at stock: the ladies took possession of the big parlour.

Only one invited guest was absent. Freddy Armstrong, now a stalwart lad of fifteen, had not been allowed to come. The invitation had been sent by Mrs. Marson to Freddy's father, for Mrs. Armstrong was long dead. A curtly polite

note had been sent in reply—a note of refusal that Freddy himself was forced to leave at the farm.

“But I shall see you for a minute on your birthday, Charlie,” Freddy had said. “I shall wish you many happy returns—either when I’m going to school or coming back.”

Freddy called at the farm that morning, but Charlie had not then returned from church.

“He’s certain to look in as he goes home this afternoon,” Charlie said to himself more than once; and between four and five o’clock as he was strolling through the meadows with a little party of guests, he espied Freddy in the distance. Excusing himself for a few minutes, Charlie went to meet his friend. To enable Freddy if questioned to say that he had met Charlie in the fields would be something.

That there was serious trouble brewing in the Armstrong household, Charlie well knew. For some years Mr. Armstrong had been a widower, and an unmarried sister of his own was acting as his housekeeper. Until lately, matters had gone on peacefully enough. Miss Armstrong was an excellent manager, and his own good mother could not have looked after Freddy’s material interests better than did Aunt Deborah. When she tried to dominate the boy’s spiritual affairs she received a severe shock. Her creed was several degrees sterner than that of her brother.

“Some vile Papist has been tampering with your son,” she said one day to Freddy’s father. Brusquely enough, the latter told her that she was out of her mind.

“Question him for yourself,” she retorted, and Mr.

Armstrong (now more than ever occupied with business that took him abroad) promised to do so at the first opportunity.

That a stern and unbending father should have an equally stern and unbending son seems natural enough: to Mr. Armstrong the fact was inexplicable and shocking. The mere idea of a boy of fifteen presuming to have religious opinions other than those in which he had been brought up, roused the man to a very fury of anger. What had he done?—what had he neglected to do?—Mr. Armstrong asked himself, that he, the senior deacon of the Calvinistic Baptists and Superintendent of the Sunday School, should have a son who unblushingly, nay sturdily and fearlessly admitted his desire to be a Roman Catholic. Surely if ever a man were justified in a liberal use of the rod, Mr. Armstrong argued, he was that man. And he had used it—used it until the boy writhed in an agony he could not hide; but without any further effect.

Charlie knew nothing of this physical punishment. Freddy told him that his father had found him reading Catholic books, had tried to extort from him an oath on the Bible that he would never again touch such matter or hold any kind of conversation with a Papist. Respectfully, but with a firmness that made the man grind his teeth, Freddy refused to take the oath or even to make a promise.

Nor did Charlie know that the boy had spent the previous Sunday locked up in his bedroom with a Bible, a loaf of bread, and a jug of water. Freddy did not speak

of these things. He had reached the age when a boy begins to feel the disgrace of punishment more than its pain.

But on this birthday afternoon as Charlie met him in the meadow—though Freddy's face lighted up for a moment as he gave his old friend hearty congratulations—it was easy to see that the maltster's son was suffering. He was the same Freddy that Charlie had always known. Almost as tall again as the little chap going in eight, he had kept his roundness and plumpness, had developed considerable length of limb and strength of muscle, walking with a slow easy stride and a firm strong tread that many a lad of eighteen might have envied. He did not look fifteen, and in its rosy innocence his face was that of a child—at this moment that of a troubled and saddened child.

"How are things going at home?" was Charlie's first question when the congratulations were over.

Freddy turned his head away as he answered, "Very bad, Charlie. About as bad as they could be."

Charlie said something sympathetic and waited.

"I expect I shall be sent away soon," Freddy went on after a pause. "Father hasn't said so, but Aunt Deborah has been hinting at it. It'll be to some boarding-school, I suppose. I didn't want to talk to you about it to-day, Charlie, but I think I'd better. You see, I might be sent off at any moment. It won't be any good. I'll go, of course, but I won't stop. I can't, you know. I mean, I *daren't*."

Charlie knew not what to say. If Freddy had been an

average boy the case would have been simple enough: but Mr. Armstrong's son was not an average boy. He had not been an average child: it was unlikely that he would be an average man. Having talked the matter over with Father Connelly, Charlie would have known exactly what to say to an ordinary youngster who fancied that he wanted to be a Catholic. No one knew better than Charlie that the case of the lad before him was an exceptional one. The very last time they had talked together Freddy had said: "You see, Charlie, it's like this: if I die a Protestant I shall lose my soul. It isn't as if I had any doubt at all. I just haven't. I know that I *must* be a Catholic. I've thought about it for more than five years: I've read about it for the last two years. I've prayed about it ever since I came to see you when you were ill."

Under these circumstances, to tell a boy not to do anything in a hurry, not to be rash, to wait and pray and live in hope of a change in his father's attitude—all this seemed absurd.

"Is your father *very* angry just now?" Charlie inquired.

"He couldn't be more angry, I think. And it's very bad for him. He's so stout, you see. Oh, and I forgot to tell you, Charlie, he found that *Garden of the Soul*. I'm so sorry, but he burnt it. I told him it wasn't mine."

"Don't bother about it, Freddy. You've got your beads haven't you?"

Again the head turned away and the rosy cheeks grew rosier.

"He found them too," Freddy said after a pause.

"But—but how could he?" Charlie asked. "You wore them next to your skin didn't you, Freddy?"

The averted head nodded.

"You don't mean to say that he stripped you?"

Another nod.

"But why? Oh, I say, Freddy old chap, you don't mean to say that he's been stripping you to flog you?"

No nod this time. Freddy had almost turned his back upon his friend. Charlie expressed his horror and disgust. "Was it very bad, old man?" he asked. "Tell me about it."

With his head well down and printing little patterns in the rain-washed field-path with his nailed boot, Freddy said:

"The last one was. It was the day before yesterday. He called a man in from the farm and had me fastened down on a bed. I didn't mean to cry out, but I couldn't help it. It hurt fearfully. He used a whip of some sort: I couldn't see it. When I took my shirt off he saw the rosary. That was why he flogged me so hard."

"But, Freddy!" exclaimed the amazed and disgusted Charlie, "you—you—"

"I know, Charlie. But I thought he'd better do it. Yes, I could have got away before they tied me down, but I thought it would only make father more angry."

Charlie had always counselled the boy to obedience and submission: he could not now give contrary advice. And yet—

"But it's the last time, Charlie!" Freddy said, turning round now and looking his friend in the face. "I'm sure my father doesn't really know how passionate he is. He'll hurt me more than he means to, and I must hinder that. Besides"—and a strong light suddenly came into the clear blue eyes—"I've thoroughly made up my mind to be a Catholic. All the flogging in the world won't make me change. If he turns me out of doors I can get work somewhere."

"Freddy!" exclaimed Charlie, "have you really counted the cost? Do you know what you're giving up?"

"Yes," said the lad quickly, "I know what I'm giving up. At any rate, I know that my father is worth forty thousand pound, at the very least, and that I'm his only son. If it were forty million I wouldn't promise not to be a Catholic."

In some boys of that age the words would have been mere brag: Freddy meant every one of them.

"If the worst came to the worst," Charlie began, "Mr. Marson might—"

"No," interrupted the boy, "that wouldn't do, Charlie. It's ever so good of you to think of it. But it wouldn't do at all. My father would only come here and have a row with Mr. Marson and take me back home. No, if I leave him I shall go right away. I know what I want to do. I'm afraid to say it, Charlie, even to you. But I shall write to you, never fear. And you—"

"Write? my dear Freddy, every day if you like."

Freddy was afraid to stay longer, and after a few more words the two separated.

“Seems to me,” Charlie said to himself as he strolled back to the house, “that I am not the only boy who has come of age to-day. In some things Freddy is my senior.”

CHAPTER XXI.

NINE YEARS LATER.

IN the passing of nine years changes are many. Obviously enough, everybody living is nine years older, and if, nine years ago, Charlie Chittywick was one-and-twenty, he is now thirty years old. He is also a married man and a father.

To the eye of a visitor Ridingle town has changed very little: to the eye of a resident not at all. It was inevitable that, sooner or later, Miss Rippell's shop should be enlarged, but the big sheets of plate glass that have taken the place of the bow-window do not materially alter the general effect of the High Street. Colpington's shop does not seem to have changed by so much as the position of a bottle of scent: it cannot however be said that the chemist himself was not looking older. There are folk who tell William Lethers that he is as young as ever: most of them are people who owe him money. Colonel Rugger-son is not an old man, but the death of his wife seems to have added to his years.

One of the really important changes has been the coming of the Squire. It is a great matter that Ridingle Hall should be inhabited, albeit by a poor, a desperately poor man. His influence in the place is hard to account for, yet

that influence is strong. To be poor is bad enough, but to be a Catholic is, in the eyes of most of the Ridingle folk, much worse; yet the Squire is both these things. However, the people cannot forget that he is of the old Dalesworth stock, and, though they would like him to be better off, they congratulate themselves upon the fact that he belongs to them and is no mill-owning, factory-building interloper.

Father Connelly, who was old when he first came to Ridingle, has retired, and his place is taken by Father Horbury who, it is said, was Mr. Ridingle's school-mate, and, like the Squire himself, a convert. Things Catholic are beginning to look up throughout the Dale. The old chapel in Hall Lane seems very full at Sunday Mass.

Mr. and Mrs. Marson are still hale and hearty, and prouder than ever of their adopted son Charlie Chittywick. For though, in marrying Mrs. Marson's favourite niece, Charlie acted with perfect freedom, there is no denying the fact that the marriage gave immense satisfaction to the good old people, and that, if he had wedded to order, the Marsons could not have been more delighted. Perhaps since the beginning of the world no young man had ever proposed to a maiden with quite such a feeling of hopelessness as that experienced by Charlie. Except that his love was honest and true, he had nothing to urge in his own favour. Everything seemed to be against the success of his suit. Only a year or two before, his father had died in prison. The memory of his own antecedents must, he

thought, be still fresh throughout the neighbourhood. He had nothing yet that he could call his own: his position was that of a superior labourer on the farm of his adopted parents. It was quite true that he had become Mr. Marson's right-hand man, and that he was already looked up to by the rest as the "young gaffer;" yet he hoped and prayed that it might be many years before he would inherit the farm. However, to his complete surprise and overwhelming joy, the favourite niece had accepted him.

But if you would fully realize the fact that nine years have really passed away since Charlie Chittywick came of age, just make a Christmas call at Marson's Farm and inquire for Father Armstrong. If he is not there, you will find him at the Ridingdale Presbytery. In either place he is at home, though he is only a visitor.

He is no longer little Freddy Armstrong. At the age of fifteen, when you saw him last, he was not little; to-day he is in every sense of the word a man. Though not really tall, he has height and breadth. When he laughs—he does this often enough—he looks very young: when his face is in repose he is by no means boyish-looking. He was ordained priest three months ago, and his work lies in a big northern city. This is by no means his first visit to Ridingdale since that memorable afternoon when Charlie met him in the fields. The story of his life for the last nine years is too long to be told in detail; yet it is a very simple story.

On Charlie's coming-of-age day Freddy had had a strong

presentiment that his father was going to take some very decisive action. The boy was not prepared for what happened that very night. He had scarcely reached home when his aunt informed him that his father had telegraphed from Leeds to say that Freddy was to pack up at once, and be ready to leave Ridingle on the following morning. Mr. Marson himself was coming home by the eight o'clock train. Freddy did not pack up. He waited for the arrival of his father, and in a few firm but respectful, and even pleading, words declared his intention of becoming a Catholic.

That night Freddy found himself homeless. Too angry for coherent speech, Mr. Armstrong had almost thrown his son into the street. Part of that night the boy spent in an out-house belonging to his father: long before dawn he took to the high-road. In his pocket he had exactly ten-pence.

Freddy was homeless, but he was not without a plan for the future. Some twenty-five miles or so from Ridingle there was a house which was spoken of by the country people as "the Monastery." It was not a monastery at all, but a Catholic school kept by a small community of religious men. Before sunset Freddy had reached it. Asking for the Principal, the boy begged to know if he was in need of a servant—outdoor or indoor. At first he said nothing of his determination to be a Catholic. Charlie had told him that every person required long and careful instruction before being received into the Church: Freddy's

great desire was to live in or near some place where he could receive that instruction.

No servant was needed in this Catholic College, but the Father Principal could not but be interested in his visitor, and after putting many questions to him—the answers to which astonished his Reverence not a little—Freddy was offered supper and a bed. That same night the priest wrote several letters, two of which went to Ridingdale. In the end, this school became the home of Mr. Armstrong's son for nearly three years. When the day of Baptism came, both Father Connelly and Charlie drove over from Ridingdale to be present at the ceremony. Freddy's radiant happiness was something never to be forgotten—only to be compared with a day that came nine years later, that of his ordination.

Freddy had scarcely passed from the school to the seminary when his father died. On his death-bed Mr. Armstrong had asked to see his son. The boy started at once, but he was too late. However, in his father's will there was that which Freddy could not but regard as a sign of forgiveness, for to his amazement he found that he inherited a hundred a year.

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On the first Christmas after Father Armstrong's ordination there was much excitement in Ridingdale, for not only was the young priest to say the midnight Mass, he was to preach at the *Missa Cantata* on Christmas Day.

Certainly it was not the music that attracted the crowd on that happy occasion, for, to be truthful, both the singing and the playing of Mozart's Twelfth Mass could scarcely have been worse. Squire Riddingdale's boys were all in the nursery at this period; Lance was not yet twelve months old, and Hilary was not quite six, and the great musical reform had not begun. As Father Horbury said afterwards, if anything could have mitigated the happiness of such a festival, it would have been the distressing performance of his mixed choir.

But the many Protestants who had come to hear "young Armstrong" preach did not go away unimpressed. William Lethers faithfully collected their comments and impressions, and the remark that was made oftenest and amused him most was, "Well, I must say that if he'd been a Baptist, he couldn't have preached a more Gospel sermon."

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"If your father had been alive, I feel sure he would have come to hear you," said Charlie as he and the young priest sat together alone on that happy Christmas night.

"I think he would," the other replied. "I feel sure that when he sent for me he wanted to forgive me. And, yes, I think he would have crept in to-day—at any rate for the sermon."

"God is too good to me!" exclaimed Charlie. "The whole day has been crowded with happiness."

“Don’t forget that I am *your* convert. If it had not been for you—”

“No, no,” Charlie remonstrated, “don’t say that. God wanted you, my dear Father Fred, and He called you.”

“That is quite true, my dear Charlie; but I shall always think that you had much to do with my conversion. You made me think. Nay, you taught me how to pray. Somehow, ever since I was a little brat you have in one way or other been my good angel. Providence threw us together. You have no idea how much I owe to you. O yes, I know all that you are going to urge, Charlie, but I will have my say. Your example was everything. I was only a little chap when—you *turned to the right and kept straight on*; but I understood.”

“Let us say that God offered each of us a grace, and—” Charlie hesitated.

“And we took it,” said Father Armstrong. “Blessed be God!”

Charlie knelt at the young priest’s feet for a good-night blessing.

THE END.

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